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Rosita Forbes

APPOINTMENT WITH DESTINY

by
ROSITA FORBES

With 55 illustrations



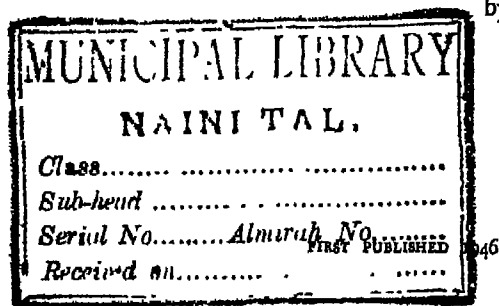
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This book continues the adventures and experiences narrated by
Rosita Forbes in *Gypsy in the Sun*

TO
DAISY AND 'JIMMY WIGAN'
who encouraged the writing of this book
TO
BRENDA DE CHIMAY AND CONSTANCE HOLT
who advised me in opposite directions

"We are not many; yet we are enough
To do for England what our strength can do.
This is the hour we were born to meet,
And all we are and everything we have—
The last red drop of manhood—let pour
Into the balance as the hour strikes.
We need to know we have held nothing back.
'Tis all we need. We do not need to live."

From 'Harold of England'
by KERR RAINSFORD, Katonah,
Westchester Co., U.S.A.



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APPOINTMENT WITH DESTINY

CHAPTER I

1935 to 1936

*In Search of any Future. Flight to India. The 'Burma Road'.
Viceroy's House. Mourning for King Emperor*

WHEN I WAS SMALL, it seemed to me that Great-Uncle William was a personage. He had been dead for a long time, but that did not matter. His portrait was enough. It occupied most of the wall at the top of the stairs, beyond the tall grandfather clock. Frock-coated and portly, whiskered, obviously a three-bottle man, with a suggestion of good port, satisfactorily digested, lingering about his rubicund countenance, Great-Uncle—outsized in oils—beamed at us as we climbed to lessons, or to bed. His cattle hung on every wall. Some had strayed into our nursery. Their portraits also were in oils. Heavily framed in the Victorian fashion, bulls which made international stud history, heifers sold for fabulous sums to South American estancias stared at us—without expression. Their self-sufficiency was complete. Long before I recognized the habits of French verbs, I could distinguish between the triangular design of a milking matron and the squared bone structure indicating beef.

Cows were very important in our family. Great-Uncle made a fortune—for those days of plenty, income-tax unknown—when his fabulous herd was sold. Bids were in foreign speech, distressing to Lincolnshire neighbours—but 'foreign' to them meant anything beyond their ken, anyone unrelated by generations of intermarriage. Not so to Great-Uncle William. Wherever pedigree cattle were breeding, he considered common ground for a man of parts. We heard the story from Father's agent, old Mr. Tyndal. We heard it again and again as we grew to schoolroom size, but it varied little with the years. The Farmer King, Louis of France, wanted advice about his herd—heirs to Marie Antoinette's farm at Trianon. Where did he turn but to old William Torr, who—though we did not realize it—was not so old in those days, pre-second Empire, pre-Republic. It was a long way then from the Lincolnshire fens to Paris. But Great-Uncle had his best mare harnessed to the gig. She could show a clean pair of heels to anything short of a chaser. It was raining hard. It generally does in the fens. It went on raining—with the cool and unashamed persistence of an English habit. The river was in flood. Great-Uncle made for the

ford. There was no sign of it. Turgid water, tea-coloured like most of our Lincolnshire dykes, swirled between the shelving banks. At this point in the tale, Mr. Tyndal, square, stalwart, reliable, keeper of other men's consciences in the matter of rents and repairs, always became excited. Great-Uncle was not to be kept from Paris—and a King who understood cattle—by mere water. Paying no attention to his companion's protests, he urged the mare into the river. The swollen waters may—or may not!—have splashed over their heads. Anyway, the high wheels must have touched bottom. The mare swam. The two men precariously seated—in frock-coats and high stocks we pictured them, because of the portrait on the stairs—were soaked to the chins. 'Old' Mr. Tyndal, young then and spry, clung to the gig and prayed. Great-Uncle familiarly encouraged the mare. "She'll do it!" he said. She did. In a spate of black mud, peculiar to our fens, wheels slipping, Great-Uncle chortling and his agent shivering, they clambered up the farther bank. The farmer-squire would not wait to change. With slime squelching out of his high boots, his best suit dripping, he drove on, post-haste, towards London.

To us that drive became as important as Paul Revcre's ride. After the story had been told a few times, Great-Uncle dripped all the way to Paris! But he got there—and he got there under circumstances supposed to be 'impossible'.

That was my heritage—a disbelief in the word 'impossible' and a traditional bundle of responsibilities. For my father's family had the love of the soil in their bones. They were neither rich nor poor, but old-established on their own acres, and they had 'a feeling'—evidently—for cows. My brother still enjoys them—in Kent, 'Hell's Corner' of the 1940-41 blitz, chief covert since then for robot planes. Wounded in the last war, a leg stiff, his Lincolnshire place an R.A.F. station, the park cemented for hutments, the woods—the age-old woods, beech and pine, once candle-lit by primroses or with a ground mist of bluebells—felled for war timber, he lives in a black-and-white Elizabethan house on land approved by his cows. The hum of shell and plane are as the drone of honey-burdened bees. The air is thick with shrapnel. His labourers work in tin hats. Flying-bombs are shot down in his meadows as if they were high pheasants, the wind in their tails. My brother John remains unperturbed. So do the cows. They chew the cud—of rich Kentish grass, doubtless also of their reminiscences. Like ours at times, their sense of proportion must be strained. Mine is always stretched between the habits and ideas inherited with that background of hunting and farming, of plough-land swelling to the flat horizon, of turnips and potatoes in Lincolnshire loam, of garden talk and the village church with Norman arches—as much a personality as the village postmaster who sold peppermint sticks or the carpenter brothers weighing eighteen and twenty stone known as 'fat kine and lean'—and the romance of my mother's origin. For her

people were Spaniards and Scots. Reavers of the wild border country who lived by their raids and made history with their loves and hates. Venturous Toledans who sought gold and imposed the Cross at the sword's point in South America.

My half-Spanish grandmother looked down on our breakfast—eggs and bacon, on sun-bleached mahogany designed by Thomas Chippendale. Her portrait, Victorian in its shine and stiffness, made her the more incredible. Enormous blue eyes, deep-set and dark, blue-black hair and a shawl of black Castilian lace emphasized the authority of centuries, for her bones were shaped into a subtle haughtiness of line, familiar to Velazquez. Her hands were incomparable. Yet they were accustomed to adventure—in expensive gloves. With her father she had ridden over the Andes, when horseback was the only way to go, and through forests that are now the Panama Canal, a tame monkey on her wrist, a 'slave' at her stirrup. She used to tell us of the mountain huts in which she slept. A sheep was always tethered beside her bed of striped rugs. It provided bait for insects. "They preferred the sheep," she explained in her voice of silver. It was too clear and quiet for gold. But even when she was a hundred and four and mixing up Mr. Gladstone, whom she thought 'impulsive' and 'on occasions harsh', with that 'delightful Mr. Disraeli' who kissed her hand like a Spaniard—even then her voice reminded me of old silver. Thin and worn it was, but delicately exquisite like a Queen Anne teapot which Mother always used.

So with Spaniard and Scottish clansman, Lincolnshire farmer and squire in my blood, with a thousand different intentions in my mind, I was beset by the need of a destiny. All my forebears had found one and made suitable oblation. Some lost their heads—or, more soberly, their properties—when they opposed Cromwell. Others lost their senses—awhile—on strange quests. One of them married a Peruvian dancer, another a singularly disagreeable Spanish grandee. It was my inevitable duty, then, as well as my need and pleasure, to find—in the thirties—'el maktub', that which, according to the Arabs, 'is written' and cannot be obliterated. No matter if it were as hard to live with as the Toledan greatling! Most of England felt the same—but in less desperate measure. For by the time I was conscious of being grown up—in fact as well as in years—half the world was in search of a future . . . any future. I could not make up my mind where my own should be. The two countries which had given me most intellectual stimulus were America and Russia. I admired the first for its practical achievements and the second for the religion it had made of labour. But I did not want to live, year in year out, in either. For neither could be called simple—except in the magnitude of their designs. Somewhere, I knew I must find a fragment of earth fresh as the first morning in Eden. I did not want comfort or intellectual intercourse. I wanted an old-fashioned and primitive condition dependent on my

own brains and hands. Nothing could be more out of date. So I did not talk about it. Indeed no one would have been interested. For the League of Nations was in jeopardy. Italy and Mr. Eden were—decidedly—at odds. Europe—with furtive haste—was backing out of intentions and enthusiasms, of beliefs, promises and treaties. Laval was being specious and Sir Samuel Hoare too reasonable for popular digestion. It was—in fact—1935. Late that autumn, Mussolini achieved the first of his imperial ambitions. His troops invaded Abyssinia.

It happened that we were staying with the Vernons at Sudbury when the news came. For a long time England had been on edge—wondering and bewildered. For it must be confessed that we were torn between two principles. Devoted as we were to the League and to the ideal of civilized government, we found ourselves forced to choose between the two. Italy had thrust Abyssinia into the League of Nations to save her from that scarecrow of the Latin races, 'British Imperialism'. In her 'gentlemen's agreement' with England—over the Mediterranean—she had made clear to the politicians concerned that she counted on a free hand with the Negus. But the Duce had not reckoned with the extraordinary character of the English. As one man, they supported the legend of a united Christian empire in Ethiopia.

Like every household in this obstinate island—curious mixture of impetuosity and slow movement—the Sudbury party talked for three days of nothing but the Italian crime. Lord Vernon had just paid the local mason's bill. With the receipt came an impassioned letter from this ordinary British workman. It began: "My Lord,—It may not become a humble person like myself to express my ideas on paper, but it seems to us all in this village that if Britain does not fight now, there is no use talking of honour any more." There were three pages of the same appealing—and outraged—sentiment. We all agreed. I remember feeling swollen with pride and pleasure. In an emergency I thought the English were sound. When it came to an emotion—so rare among our countrymen—they never counted cost. I quite forgot all I had seen in Abyssinia. I would have gone out and fought Italy—excited as any villager who had travelled no farther than Sudbury. I agreed with Frankie Vernon, ardent democrat, theoretic socialist, that the League must justify its existence. Not till cooler years did I begin to question whether to fight on the side of savagery against the imposition of civilization—by brute force—is the mission of democracy. Still, in these war years, I am puzzled by the Abyssinian question. Italy was wholly in the wrong, of course. But nothing could have been worse than the filth, disease, cruelty and corruption for which—according to General Sir Alan Cunningham, conqueror in East Africa—Italy substituted, in four years, a moderate prosperity. It is very bewildering to find oneself fighting—with every right—to maintain what is

wrong. Fortunately, in the horror which Italy's aggression—and her mustard gas—aroused, I was no more reasonable than anyone else.

For comfort, I went to Central Asia. A friend of Arthur's,¹ Colonel Grassette, put the idea into my head. He had tried to travel through Afghanistan into the Soviet Union over the new 'military road', by which Kabul had recently been linked with Termez on the southern frontier of the U.S.S.R. Both Governments had refused him passage. "A woman might do it," he suggested. "Why don't you try?"

On a shining afternoon in early January 1936 I called at the Soviet Embassy in London. In front of an enormous desk—in a room reminiscent of Geneva and the waste spaces of any conference—I remarked that it had become necessary for me to go to Samarkand. An amiable official immediately assumed the air of detachment with which his country at that time strove to conceal unease in matters bureaucratic. He said, "Personally, I've no objection, but I don't expect Moscow will agree."

"Through Afghanistan," I added firmly.

"Is there a way? Are you sure?" We looked at maps. With kindness and care, the official helped me to make out a long declaration putting in the most reasonable light my impulse to cross the Hindu Kush and the Oxus river into Russian Turkestan. In triplicate the form went to Moscow. 'Sensible' people assured me that was the last I would hear of it. Even my acquaintance at the Soviet Embassy permitted himself unusual frankness. "At the moment, the frontier you wish to cross is generally regarded as closed," he said.

To the surprise of everyone concerned, Moscow—already an individual in my mind with likes and dislikes, habits and crotchets!—accorded me a transit visa. Russian officials who, through long familiarity with England in winter, must have been forced to the conclusion that, as a race, we enjoy discomfort and are averse to mental effort, regretted my exclusion from the earthly paradise visualized from completely different angles by Tamerlane, Marshal Stalin and the *Daily Worker*. They said in effect, "It's a pity you won't be able to see anything you want, but you can't say we've been unreasonable. You can spend a week on a Russian train—such a good train."

We talked a lot about trains. I did not mention that the word 'transit', so limited in opportunity, becomes with ease—and a blot or two—the much more inviting word 'tourist'. I saw no reason why that visa—like others on which I have travelled over forbidden frontiers—should not be stretched to cover my designs. They were harmless. I liked Russia. I wanted to see what she had made of Central Asia.

So few adventures are comfortable. But mine began well. For I flew to India in a hospitable K.L.M. plane, as the guest of that enterprising Dutch line. The Wernhers were my companions and a large fair man waiting to marry somebody else's wife. He told me about

¹ Colonel Arthur McGrath, the author's husband.

it in mid-sky. To cheer him, I took him to a New Year's Eve ball in Baghdad. It was the greatest fun. For the last time I met Jaafer Pasha, an old friend subsequently murdered—when Rashid Ali sought to bring Iraq under Axis influence. Nuri Pasha, the present Prime Minister, was gay and cryptic. I said to him, "You have another Lawrence in the desert." "Who?" he asked. "Captain Glubb, of course." I had met this remarkable and solid young man on an armoured car among the Aneiza tribesmen. It was some years ago, but I remembered his effect on contradictory witnesses—after a raid. Nuri looked at me with poker simplicity. "You do not like Captain Glubb?" he said. No epitaph could have been more explicit.

Before I had time to expostulate, a young airman said, "Our boss wants to see you. He says he knows you." An Air Vice-Marshal seemed to me, in those days, somewhat dim and remote. I had had little to do with the sky. But it turned out to be 'Ginger Mitchell', whom I had known as a subaltern in India. Inextricably he is, for me, confused with an elongated Mercédès racing-car, which I drove persistently and at an outrageous pace over a lot of England—just after the last war. Probably the car was his. I remember it going on for ever outside several police courts—for I do not think it could do less than forty miles an hour. It never cared for that.

The airman withdrew with a mocking, "Glad to have brought you two young things together." And in the intervals of listening to the large fair man on the subject of his future, 'Ginger' and I discussed our pasts. They had diverged a long time ago.

That night I did not go to bed at all. While it was still dark, Sir Harold Wernher, the hopeful co-respondent, and I clambered into the plane. Lady Zia had tried a different way of managing the journey. For she had gone to bed with afternoon tea. The result was charming. While her husband and I—equally haggard—changed out of our party clothes behind the exiguous shelter of a door which there was no room to shut, she cheerfully culled and folded the garments we discarded.

I slept all through Persia. It was India when I woke. A five-page letter of hospitable instructions from Lady Willingdon waited for me on the aerodrome. It ended with a suggestion that I should look at Burma before carrying out all the plans she had made for me.

I did so—under the wing of the Burma Oil Company, in the persons of Kenneth and Ann Harper. They plucked me out of the plane at Rangoon and made me free of their entirely satisfactory house. It was on a lake. There were islands and palm-trees and temples, priests in marigold yellow, insidious cocktails, admirable parties and such flowers as I had never believed possible. There was even an admiring—and not too young—man, who invited me to go up Chindwin River with him.

When the local papers had finished with me I did no work at all. I travelled with an armchair mentality to Lashio on the Chinese frontier

and looked at the famous Burma Road—lifeline of Chiang Kai Shek—wandering into the plains of Yunan. I stayed with the rulers of the Shan States, British and Burmese. I was enchanted by almond blossom frothing under bamboos, and by the tinsel fragility of Mandalay. One night I walked through the street of the sculptors, and in the hard, white moonlight saw the big 'highly respected' gods and the small ones sitting in the dust. Most of them were unfinished. At three in the morning I talked with a brown man in a loincloth. He was carving a god with many limbs. "Do you really think He looks like that?" I asked.

"How can mortal head conceive the brain which made the universe?" retorted the sculptor. "How can human eyes see or human effort reproduce the hands which gave life to humanity?"

How excellent an answer! For the Burmese sculptor sought to create not an exact image of divinity, but a suggestion of unlimited power.

King George died on the day I returned to Rangoon, and within an afternoon there was no black material left. I could get nothing but an arm-band, and that was contrived from a man's evening tie. With this to prove my intentions, I flew to Calcutta. There I stayed with a kindly jute merchant and his wife, and dined on occasions with Sir John Anderson, who interested me enormously. For Bengal at that moment was troublesome. H.E. was logical and firm. I remember sitting next to him at a small dinner—I think there were only four or five of us. There was the usual conversation about the possibilities of assassination. An A.D.C. protested that it was dangerous for the Governor to ride regularly on the Maidan. This is a large open space, a plain in the middle of Calcutta. Sir John impressed me by saying, "I am not going to change my habits—or my mind—or indeed my policy." It might have been Arthur speaking—on his way to the Cabinet offices in the middle of a 1940 raid.

The Governor, I thought, knew what he intended to do and did it. I generally hesitate between intention and action. That is because I always see two or more sides to a question. For instance, in India I see all the practical benefits of British rule. I cannot sufficiently admire the development of roads and transport, hospitals, scientific research and education. I realize all that has been done for agriculture and the prodigious achievement represented by the security of a whole continent. These are dull things to Indian agitators, inflamed by their own eloquence, by their intentional blindness and by some real wrongs. But I imagine the ordinary Hindu or Moslem peasant is thankful for such dullness. It is no small thing that in the great federation of states and provinces erroneously called the country of India, our rule has established security for the sophisticated and the savage, for every extreme of culture and primitive simplicity—and this after twenty centuries of unrelenting war. Asoka, I imagine, last and greatest of

liberal Asian dictators, saw the end of Indian peace—until it was restored by British traders and soldiers. But my friends among the Nationalists would never acknowledge this. They were brilliant talkers, but very muddled thinkers. They were oppressed by the appalling inferiority complex which I believe is our sole crime against India. For this miserable and painful barrier to sensible co-operation between Indian and Briton, we must accept responsibility. To my mind it is our one unjustifiable mistake.

I remember Madame Sarojini Naidu, poetess and patriot, rebel of course—possibly now in prison—stirring herself and me to illogical emotion by her protest, "We want our own merchant fleet. But you insist on our trade going by your ships, so that your seamen may be sure of employment. We want our own mills. You take our cotton for Manchester. We want our own factories. You need our raw material for yours—and you resell it to us at a high price after its manufacture has paid your English wages."

All this—in 1935-36—was true. But it was also capable of adjustment. It was not a primal wrong—which India could put in the scales against Britain's gifts of health, peace and schooling in its broadest sense. I found the lovely little Begum Shah Nawaz's plaint of an importance more fundamental. At a zenana party, to which men—brothers, cousins and admired national leaders—were admitted, she said, "I think what we mind most in the British attitude to India is the fact that you make money here, but not homes. For you, India is a place which may give you a fortune to spend somewhere else. But you do not want to make intimate friends or an intimate life among us."

There, I believe, is one of the justifiable complaints of India. On the other hand, in return for the fortunes, we gave the best we had—in courage, labour, service and justice.

From Calcutta I went to Viceroy's House at Delhi. An A.D.C. whom I cannot help thinking tactless, showed me—in my brown and green tweed with a pheasant's scarlet tail-feather streaming out of my hat—into the middle of a dinner-party. It seemed to me enormous and all black or all white. It was really only the people staying in the house—Lady Pentland and an attractive daughter, I remember, and young Lord Ronaldshay interested in aeroplanes. There must have been many others, for the Willingdons were continuously and most helpfully hospitable. As I curtsied to 'B'—feeling hot, bothered and unsuitable—she deftly removed my hat. "You'll have to sacrifice that feather," she said.

In the end, Lady Pentland came to the rescue, or was it her daughter? Anyway, I borrowed a white cotton dress, which was washed nightly, and Arthur sent me by airmail the most alluring black georgette. The model had been described as "*Mon désir*". As Arthur omitted to include the slip, so that I went from one Government House to another in a state of scarcely shadowed revelation, the name was justified.

I thought Viceroy's House completely satisfying. However much architects and artists may criticize, it gives an impression of splendour and power without pomposity, of beauty without garish emphasis. It is also very comfortable. I liked 'B' Willingdon's purples, although I do not want to wear them next the skin—to generate energy. It is interesting to me that the two most vital women I know, the Vicereine of 1935 and the late Queen of Egypt, had the same feeling for colour. But King Fuad's widow paid tribute to a tone rich and deep as a Saharan night. Both, I suspect, attributed some of their vigour to the purples or the blues with which they surrounded themselves.

I shall always remember the round, walled garden at Viceroy's House. Whenever I could escape from the multiple physical activities of my English friends and the ideas expressed in brilliant speech by my Indian ones, I sat alone in that garden. There is no possible description. It was just colour. When I shut my eyes, I felt the massed flowers—red, pink, lime yellow and blazing orange, all the blues and misty lilacs, as a rainbow bound across my lids. The garden was not very large. There were butterflies which drifted like petals torn by the wind. There were a few raucous birds. But it was the flowers which mattered. They were incomparable.

As I travelled to the North West Frontier—slowly, by way of the hospitable Rajput states and a number of official houses—I became aware first—and constantly—of all that Britain had done in the way of solid, hard, dull work for the good of India. I saw the things that no travellers tell because they are boring—marshes drained, schools multiplied, childbirth robbed of its terrors and its martyrdom, justice accepted as a right—not bargained for at exorbitant prices—new villages built, new lands developed, seed and instruction broadcast. I saw the miracle of security in a land torn by racial and religious strife, by politics, bitterness and personal ambitions. And I was very proud of my own country.

On the other hand, I heard the talk of charming young Hindus, men and girls fresh from the universities, elegant, indescribably ardent—products of a universal system which from the Balkans to China produces too many professional workers and too few manual labourers.

With force, intelligence and a tragic sense of inferiority, they talked as recklessly as they rode their bicycles. For—until the war provided diverse employments—they had nothing else to do. Summing up the situation for my own satisfaction, I decided that India had had—like other countries primarily dependent on agriculture—too much unspecialized education and a surfeit of politics. She did not need more and still more government officials, doctors and lawyers. What she did require was thousands of good sound farmers content to live on the land and artisans prepared to begin at the bottom of a specific trade. Hindus and Moslems, I thought, had too many amateurs in every walk of life. By the time I reached Peshawar—a trifle jaundiced because the

only sense left to me after so many conflicting impressions was an appreciation of my own ignorance—I found I could not wholly approve or disapprove any attitude I had hitherto encountered except that of a few disillusioned but magnificently disinterested and laborious British officials who ‘carried on as usual’ however spiritually unprofitable their task.

Altogether, I have spent about two years in India. Each visit leaves me more conscious of the difficulties with which the best brains of Britain—and now it seems of America—are oppressed. My idea is that India should never have been regarded as *one* country. It is *not* a country. It is a far more complicated continental system than Europe. Hindu Travancore has far less relationship with the Moslems of the Punjab, for instance, than Greece with Portugal. How is it possible to deal with a continent as if it were one nation? I doubt if India could ever achieve the unity of the U.S.A.—or even such modified agreement as existed in the Austro-Hungarian empire. India could not be content with one freedom. She would have to have a different freedom for every one of her peoples or combinations of people.

Roughly, I imagine a form of Pakhistan—division of Moslem and Hindu provinces—will have to be adopted, supported by a considerable exchange of populations. But there will still be three hundred and more princely states and any number of different races, religions and layers of civilization at the mercy of politicians. The problem is too vast for one generation. It would be a step to its solution if India would think in terms of ‘federation’ instead of that meaningless word ‘freedom’. What freedom had Siam or Holland or Yugoslavia? No country is free unless it can feed itself and defend itself.

CHAPTER II

1936

The North West Frontier and General Alexander. Singular Arrival at Kabul. One Magpie. A Frenchman on the Subject of Women. Across the Hindu Kush with George and Kuli Khan

WITH SIR FRANCIS GRIFFITHS I stayed at Government House in Peshawar. General Alexander was then commanding at Nowshera. On all sides he was said to be ‘the coming man’. Oddly enough an Indian in the Frontier Constabulary gave me the most prophetic appreciation of North Africa’s recent Commander-in-Chief. He said,

"There you have a great General. He is sufficiently intelligent to see all roads—and to concentrate on one."

Eventually the snows melted. Lorries could go through the Khyber Pass. So, into Afghanistan I drove—waving a triumphant passport at Mr. Yeats-Brown and Lady Beatrice Ormsby-Gore, regretful upon the Indian side of the frontier. In time—and after the usual delays and small adventures—I arrived in Kabul. The driver of the lorry, on which I had shared a seat with two pregnant women and the goats intended as foster-mothers, said he would accompany me to the British Legation. We climbed on to a tonga and drove wildly into the night. Conversation developed as follows: "If the Legation is in the city, where are we going? There are no more houses. We are in the country. Oh—don't beat the horse. Tell him not to beat the horse."

Chauffeur: How, then, shall we arrive? Truly we are going in the wrong direction, but he is an old man and feeble. I have my revolver.

Me: I hope it isn't loaded—

Interval for incomprehensible and apparently heart-rending exchange.

Coachman: There is the Legation—you are at its doors. I tell you it is in the town.

Chauffeur: I see nothing. Truly, the great English do not live on a mud-heap. Oh, Mullah, to what bad end are you taking us?

Me: Is he a Mullah? I won't have the horse beaten like this. It's half dead already.

Chauffeur: No, he is not a Mullah, but he has a beard. Since we are going ever farther from the Legation, he must beat or we shall not get there.

Roused to frenzy by our criticism, the coachman stood up and urged the remnants of his steed into a gallop. Now there was not even a tomb to keep us company. The last dog had returned to the distant city. Too much shaken for further protest, we clung to the seats and hoped for a quick end. It came. On one wheel we spun round a corner and fell on our noses in front of suitably magnificent gates.

The horse was the first to pick itself up. Some time later the chauffeur pulled me to my feet. My hat and his revolver were gone. Worse still, the gates remained shut. From the farther and more desirable side of them peered a face surrounded by a khaki muffler.

While the coachman gathered our belongings from the ruts into which they had fallen, the chauffeur and I attempted to weaken the resolution expressed on the face. We spoke in several languages without the slightest effect. This often happens in Central Asia, and one is unjustifiably annoyed because, of course, they are rarely the right languages. However, the chauffeur continued to draw the most moving pictures of my character and position, with equally pathetic references to the state of exhaustion which had—in some unexplained fashion—been responsible for our accident. Meanwhile the coachman

had put together horse, cart, and luggage. Seated in the dust a bare six inches from the gate, he was obviously prepared for an all-night argument. His speech flowed with a magnificent disregard of truth, and through the awed ejaculations of the chauffeur I found myself raised to the state of a governor's wife, several governors' wives! My car, all my cars, had broken down. My servants, a host of them, were following.

It was this duplication of material which finally persuaded the porter. To avoid the onslaught of a host, he admitted one dust-stained and dishevelled female of a race unaccustomed to falling out of tongas at Legation gates in the middle of a perfectly ordinary night without the excuse of a revolution or even of a stray assassin.

The Fraser-Tytlers received me with much kindness and a little amusement. For once there was no need to run away. Everybody was anxious I should go to Turkestan by way of the new Northern road. The India Office wanted a route map and various Embassies a report. Even the Foreign Office was benign. Never before had I received such multiple official blessing. But when I woke on the first morning and looked into the Legation garden, a solitary magpie regarded me from a poplar. It was April, but still winter in Kabul. Balefully the bird disported itself—in mourning black and white. In spite of the season, its thoughts were not of love. It never had a companion.

After this I was not surprised to hear the Hindu Kush was still deep in snow and my Russian visa had not arrived. Moreover, the Afghans were suspicious. Why should any woman wish to be uncomfortable in the mountains, instead of pleasantly entertained in Kabul.

H.E. was feeling particularly diplomatic when he 'explained' the matter to me—twelve hours after I had been upset at his gate. "There's something odd about your visit. No, I don't mean last night. It's the Afghans. They're the most hospitable people in the world when they know you, but they don't like strangers, and I can't say I blame them. They've suffered enough in the last hundred years."

Considering the first sentences while listening to the last, I decided they needed amplification. "What's odd?" I asked, and saw the Diplomatist wince.

"It would be difficult to tell you in so many words, but I feel the Afghans—mind you, they are charming people and great friends of mine—would like to have a look at you before they decide to let you loose on the North Road."

"Well, when can I see the P.M.? He is in Afghanistan, isn't he?"

The Diplomatist contrived an expression admirably suited to the sympathy he felt for both parties concerned. "I think you should resign yourself to waiting a week or two. Play their own game. If you are patient, you will probably be able to wear down their resistance. Do not hurry. Here we are so used to this sort of situation. There is never anything to be gained by hurrying."

"But what *is* the situation?" I demanded.

The Diplomatist allowed surprise to verge on disapproval. "I thought I'd explained. A certain amount of suspicion—it is a delicate matter. As I said, they're the most generous of hosts. Once they've had a look at you, I'm sure——"

"But how can they have a look at me if they won't see me?" I protested.

The Diplomatist smiled. "You'll find the situation will improve—it's just a matter of choosing the best moment——"

He was right, of course, but this reflection did not comfort me as I drove to the Soviet Embassy, its flag the brightest note of colour in a street of whitewash, mud, and leafless poplars.

An Afghan soldier, very smart in his thick khaki, opened just sufficient door for me to enter, for it was one of those old-fashioned houses surrounded by walls, in which courts and rooms lead one into another until, somewhere in the centre, one finds an unexpected garden. Here the Ambassador received me. He was a large man, portly and good-tempered. His appearance suggested that he enjoyed being amiable and would be glad to help anyone he happened to like. I thought he might like quite a lot of people, but I reminded myself gloomily that a Slavonic appearance is specially designed for the hiding of all material thought.

"But, Madame, I know nothing whatsoever about your visa. I have received no instructions at all——"

In vain I pleaded that after months of negotiation, Moscow had accorded the said visa, and London had sworn that Kabul should be informed. Even at so disastrous a moment I was amused to find we spoke of the three towns as if they were individuals, and after a while, still smiling, we used their names familiarly, saying with a shrug that no doubt 'London' had been busy, or 'Moscow' careless.

Meanwhile we politely disguised our thoughts, or, perhaps, the Ambassador, having, as it proved, no need for strategy, was merely concealing a certain discomfort at having to refuse what, as a man, he would so much rather have conceded.

In the end we compromised on a telegram. It was a good telegram and more explicit than most of those addressed to dilatory Government departments, but I had not much hope of its effect because I had sent just the same sort of telegram six years ago, first from Tehran and then from Tabriz. The result in both cases had been a decided "No", even a pleased and self-congratulatory "No". In fact my only comfort that black day was the reflection that since Russia was excellent at saying "No", there could be no reason why she should hesitate to say it, or make use of subterfuges to avoid saying it.

When I returned to the Legation to send other telegrams, I was met by a cheerful, "Well, I didn't expect them to be quite so final about it, but I'd have been more surprised if you had come back with the

visa in black and white. Now you'll *have* to be patient. Sit down, be calm, and let's see what you make of Kabul."

Another voice added, "Here, you've got the whole of modern Afghanistan——"

A third contradicted, "The reason for it, let's say——"

With the help of a delightful, crudite, taciturn and shy young man called George Galloway, I saw a lot of Kabul. In time I met the P.M. He is an uncle of King Nadir Shah and probably the wisest statesman in Asia. Where Amanullah failed, H.H. Sardar Hashim Khan has succeeded. Afghanistan is being modernized at a reasonable pace, in accordance with the religious feudalism prevailing among her people. She has been given security before mixed bathing and roads before hats and modern dresses. I liked Hashim Khan—and I think he liked me. He gave me some lovely furs—brown, grey and black caraculi. But it was the King's brother-in-law, Naim Khan, acting Foreign Minister, who saw farthest into the startling future. At a Legation party he said to me—in French—"You in India think the last great invasion will be a Russian march through Afghanistan. We know better. The Japanese are the strongest people in Asia. When they have conquered China . . . who will stop them reaching India? "

To occupy my time—when George had nothing more to show me and the great Hashim Khan no more to ask—I went to Kandahar on a truck with fifty-three Afghans. They were among the best travelling companions I have ever had, always patient, helpful and good-tempered. Among them was one French agriculturalist who delighted me with exactly the same reflections about Englishmen as Germaine Paget had expressed at Dumbleton Hall.¹ "What an effect woman has on man, except, of course, on the English. How remarkable that you should say of a man, 'He is no good. He is always after some woman.' Is it more wise then to be always after a bird or a ball? Is it that killing snipe or playing the tennis enriches the character more than the thousand intimacies one may have with a woman? Do not make a mistake. With my physiognomy so banal, it is not likely that I should immediately appeal to a woman as a lover—pardon me, but you are not frightened of words, are you, Madame? There, I have had to study women and I have become very sensitive where they are concerned. I know now there are fifty ways by which one can approach a relationship, and what can equal the satisfaction of the moment when you feel that you understand each other? It may be that I have wasted my time so far as ambition is concerned, but what a good life I have had! The Englishman is concerned always with his career. He talks of nothing but the post he should have had, but for me, to earn my living, that is enough. As for the rest, I have my books and I make myself a life of the interior——"

When I returned to Kabul I found the lonely magpie had secured a

¹ See *Gypsy in the Sun*.

mate. They were building a nest in a poplar. So I was not at all surprised when George Galloway knocked at my door. "Hurry up—the Russians are coming to tea." As a studied afterthought, the exasperating young man added, "Oh, by the way, your visa's come." For a moment I considered embracing him, but decided not to risk the mixture of feelings, all of them disapproving, which would have been reflected upon his pleasant always slightly shining face.

That day it was decided that George should come with me as far as Mazar-i-Sharif—holy city of the Shias, north of the Hindu Kush. This meant that Kuli Khan would also be of the party. The two were inseparable—although they were as opposed in character and outlook as it is possible for two men to be. Kuli Khan was highly imaginative. He suffered from nerves. He adored gloom. Superstitious and romantic, he feared and hoped for the worst. His voice was an impossible alto, his face lugubrious and hollow. Yet he was a Moslem, a soldier and a crack rifle-shot. He looked too tired to move and was in fact tireless. In emergencies his voice assumed an even more peculiar pitch, while he proved himself both enterprising and original. For Kuli Khan the world was always black until it became in reality sufficiently sombre to rouse his interest. He was the sort of man you could not possibly rely on until you were in difficulties which appeared insoluble. Kuli Khan would then take pleasure in unravelling them as if they were loose knitting.

George, on the other hand, had the appearance generally associated with pioneers, outposts of empire and obstinate British soldiers who, to the justifiable annoyance of the enemy, do not know when they are beaten. George was a pessimist with regard to personal relationships. Women he regarded with distrust engendered by susceptibility. He kept his star of optimism for the circumstances, generally harassing, which attend life in Afghanistan, Persia or other Asian countries concentrating on Europeanization. He was, of course, entirely reliable. Obviously, he would become even more so as snow fell, radiators burst and brakes broke.

It is the destiny of men like George to be relied upon by all manner of governments and public departments and by women sufficiently perspicacious and persistent to deal with armour-plated silence. For George would not talk. Sometimes he read Chinese poetry with the accent in the right places. At intervals he commented on obvious facts. Fortified by a fund of common sense, he made plans and generally remembered to tell his companions what they were. Abrupt, practical and a trifle forlorn, he was always credited with a self-possession which he did not feel. But he was as determined that strangers should believe him intolerant and egotistic as Kuli Khan was to impress the world with his incompetence and vanity.

In appearance George was robust. He could look blander than anyone I have ever met. He never lost his temper, although he had

to spend a good deal of time patching up the frayed ends of Kuli Khan's. He did not mind how early he got up, where he slept, or what he ate. He had lots of ideas, but regarded them as dangerous. He was, in spite of—or because of—such qualities, a perfect companion.

It is three hundred and eighty-two miles from Kabul to Mazar-i-Sherif. In the spring of 1936 the road was no more than a fair-weather track, impassable in snow. On the Steppes it degenerated into twin ruts. On the eleven-thousand-foot passes it became a trough between breakers of frozen mud. To the west of this 'back door' into Soviet Central Asia, lies Bamian, Valley of the Giant Buddhas,¹ described in A.D. 632 by the celebrated Chinese traveller Hiuan Tsang as a centre of art and commerce, a holy city of Buddhism, the goal of ambassadors, merchants and pilgrims from all over the known world. It must have been an Oxford and a Birmingham of mediaeval Asia. For it was one of the biggest markets on the famous Silk Road from Peking to Byzantium. The city was destroyed by Genghiz Khan, the Hitler of his age.

When I saw Bamian there was not even a ruin to mark the site of a metropolis, 'standing proudly, like Rome, at the cross-roads of the world'.

Mist lifted as we turned into the valley. The fields were bare and cleft by streams. A few fortress-farms, each with four towers, rose solidly out of the earth. On the north a rampart of red rock climbed sheer to the snowline. It was porous with caves and split by the niches of giant Buddhas. Strange flying formations rose above the honey-comb cliffs and the proud colour was splashed with green, rust brown, and indigo.

So I first saw Bamian, Valley of the Buddhas—a confusion of mist, snow, and an overpowering blood-red—with a procession of small men, red-bearded, coming in and out of the cliffs. When the wind caught them their clothes were blown backwards, so that I thought of them as walking half naked in the gale with great swirls of drapery as a background. So many clothes they wore, and so little use they seemed to be!

The driver, who rarely spoke, said, "These men are children—so small. Have they, perhaps, nothing to eat?" He was a practical person, interested in the multiple concerns of his engine and his own inside.

Day after day we laboured over the mountains. We slept at Afghan rest-houses, shot a few partridges, were held up by storms and had the usual engine troubles. Two hundred and fifteen miles from Kabul we came to the first Turkoman serai, on the edge of the Steppes. There was no village. Mongol riders tethered their horses in front of booths made of straw. A baker made flat loaves in a hole scooped out of the earth. There were a host of tea-pots. George and I established our-

¹ 150 feet high.

selves in the shelter of a reed wall—to eat our lunch. An enormous goat acted as waste-paper basket. His appetite was voracious and unquestioning. When we were at our stickiest and silted over with dust, a commotion on the other side of the bridge indicated the arrival of a personage. It turned out to be no less than the Foreign Minister, who had been shooting in the neighbouring valley. A lorry full of soldiers preceded him. A headman materialized out of the dust.

George went to meet the procession. In some remarkable way he had ceased to look smeared with butter, crumbly, or dust-stained. With becoming gravity, the two men conversed. Together they walked across the flimsy bridge. In another moment, to the awed amusement of the spectators, the Foreign Minister had seated himself amidst the fragments of lunch upon the pushtin. He had just returned from England. Doubtless he remembered that even dukes sat in ditches to eat, in a maximum of discomfort, the indigestible food considered essential to shooters. So he carried off the unusual situation with the ease of manner habitual to his countrymen.

Kuli Khan was impressed. He produced coffee with an air of other concessions to follow. The crowd thickened. The goat indicated that he was still hungry. Several soldiers in tin helmets became officious. With a few sentences the Foreign Minister dispersed our mutual admirers. "I've sent them to pray," he said, "so they will be better occupied. It is midday."

The goat, being a heathen, remained with us.

While we drank green tea, which tasted less realistic than Kuli Khan's coffee, we inquired about the state of the road.

"We want to reach Haibak to-night."

"Haibak?" exclaimed the Minister, as if he doubted the very existence of the town. He continued to look disconcerted while he murmured, "Well—providing it does not rain——"

We all looked at the sky. Then, spurred by the evident distance of Haibak, we began our farewells. The Minister pressed upon us pheasants and a duck. With another startled glance at the sun, he begged us to hurry. We did so, with the result that half the bridge fell down—fortunately behind us.

That evening provided me with an impression which is still clear. It seems to me that one of the advantages of middle age is a sharpening of aesthetic appreciation. But 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. So it can rarely be shared. For me, the first sight of the Central Asian steppes was a revelation of that healing peace which is the core of beauty. It was dusk when we came out on to the plain and saw an expanse of green—smooth rolling green lush as silk, with the sheen and the shadows of silk. Near at hand was a nomad encampment. The yurts were dark mushrooms among the grass. Towards them, in the quiet evening, there flowed from every side a sombre tide. I blinked and saw that the movement was of sheep and goats—brown

or black caraculi—returning unshepherded for the night. Camels and their foals stood knee-deep in what seemed to be pools of lilac water—but they were flowers. Herds of wild horses drifted away, manes and tails streaming in the wind. Darkness gathered gently. There was a rich warmth in the sky, but it was not voluptuous. There was something of austerity in the treeless land, lit by camp-fires. These were ruddier than the stars and aromatic. But it seemed to me as I watched the points of light flicker from one camp to another that wayward stars had fallen. Riders passed on their small sturdy horses. They were caparisoned like nursery toys. Their hoofs made no sound. Their rifle-barrels and their sword-hilts gleamed in the luminous pallor belonging neither to the day nor to the night.

We ought to have slept in the big mud-walled serai at the foot of the last pass, but snow threatened. "If you do not get across to-night, you will have to stay here for weeks," said the keeper of the caravanserai. So, encouraged by Kuli Khan who enjoyed disaster, we continued on our way. It was by this time dark and very cold. Yard by yard, putting stones under the back wheels of the lorry, we crept up towards the pass. On a hideous gradient, with only a rim of frozen, scarlet slush separating us from the precipice, our truck skidded and the engine immediately failed. Patiently the driver burrowed under the bonnet. Kuli Khan produced a scrag end of meat. From this we tore strips to eat. It grew colder. By this time hours had ceased to exist. The night had become an indefinite period. I saw no reason why it should ever end. We got out and pushed. The engine made noises. We pushed harder. The mud spat into our faces.

Then the pump burst and clouds of smoke poured from the engine. At this moment the moon chose to sail out of the clouds, and we saw the pass which we had imagined close at hand suspended far above us like a cable between two posts.

Till then the driver had been silent. But when the pump had been mended and the whole lorry ransacked to find new plugs, he made his first remark. "Had I known," he said, "we should not have come——" But Kuli Khan interrupted with a reminder of Ali waiting at Mazar-i-Sherif.

"If Allah wills, we shall greet the Sherif in heaven!" retorted the driver.

For another immeasurable period we crawled upwards. The track seemed to us a living thing which we pursued into the darkness.

I do not think any of us knew when we crossed the pass. The moon had gone. So had the fan belt. But the night was slipping away from us and the figure of Kuli Khan humped on the mudguard acquired a new perspective. "There is no more top," he called to us. The lorry began to buck like a hard-held colt.

At a terrifying pace we went downwards. George had become an image. The driver was clamped about the wheel. Kuli Khan lay flat

upon the bonnet, but he still held the light. "What's happened?" I asked. But nobody spoke. We were roaring down like a canoe caught in the rapids. Corners rushed at us and were gone. In a welter of stones and mud, with a screech of gears and a long-drawn hiss from the engine, we rocked over obstacles that we could not see. Below us lay wave after wave of hills. There appeared to be no end to them. Frozen and still, their crests filled an immensity of space that reached beyond our vision. The world had never seemed so large and so uninhabited.

An upheaval flung me against George. The lorry heeled and hesitated. "It's all right," said my British companion. "The hand-brake's gone."

Somewhere a dog barked. The road straightened. It acquired shape and purpose. "A village! There must be a village——" muttered the driver, who had been exuding fear. But it was a long time before the succeeding hills gave way.

At last, when we had given up all hope of arriving anywhere at any time, we saw a ghostly castle reared upon a mound. Its walls had crumbled. Its towers looked like decayed molars. "Haibak," came in a tenuous whisper from Kuli Khan, but the streets were deserted. On either side gaped empty houses. The doors were gone and the holes that had been windows peered with the effect of eyeless sockets.

Through this scarecrow town we went, searching for somebody alive, but there was no sound or movement. Kuli Khan left his post on the mudguard. I understood that he objected to ghosts, and indeed, in the shivering grey light precursor of the dawn, I felt we might well meet something headless or otherwise odd.

Even George was affected by the spectral effect of a town without a single inhabitant. He said, "D'you think it was an earthquake, or no water?" But his voice became more normal when he saw a light.

Kuli Khan, with teeth chattering, leaped from the lorry and pursued it, although, as he afterwards explained, he felt "in his stomach" that it might be a ghoul, if not one of those luminous serpents which lure travellers into a waterless desert—or a swamp according to the amenities of the latitude.

The light turned out to be a lantern held in the shaky hand of an old man. Hearing our shouts and fearing robbers, he had decided to hide himself and his few pieces of silver in the well. Assured of his quarry's human origin, Kuli Khan soon frustrated this purpose. With one leg over the well and the Indian's hands half throttling him, the man choked and argued. George came to the rescue. "What has happened to Haibak?" he asked.

"Nothing."

For a moment the two of them glared at each other. Then it transpired that we had come to the wrong Haibak. The other, the new

town, which was very fine—the old man registered awe—lay in a different direction.

"Will you show us the way?" We offered money, but our victim, who wore only a long cotton night-shirt and skull-cap, said he was too old. He shook as if he had an ague, but we would not let him go until he dragged from a bed of rags and straw in the corner of a mud hovel a grandson, who appeared to be half-witted.

In spite of Kuli Khan's reassurances, uttered in the voice of a mother to her first child, the boy would not put on any clothes, nor would he get into the lorry, which no doubt seemed to him a monster. While we backed and turned, the boy ran bare-footed into the country, his cotton slip blowing behind him, his knees so bowed that he looked like a fat white frog hopping frenziedly in front of us.

"We can't let him go on like this," I protested. "He'll burst——"

But Kuli Khan was ruthless. "We must find some place to sleep, although it is long after to-morrow when we must immediately go on." The confusion of thought indicated exhaustion, for Kuli Khan's pessimism was usually presented in the fewest and most destructive words.

The boy continued to run. We found Haibak—a modern bazaar with a rest-house at the end of it. Under its adequate roof Kuli Khan's pessimism returned. "There is no furniture but beds," he said.

"What else d'you want?" I asked.

Words failed the Indian. He set a bucket on one bed, the lamp on another, and went out, trailing his gloom as a garment.

CHAPTER III

1936

Surfeit in an Afghan Garden. Holy City of Mazar-i-Sherif. Speechless in Soviet Central Asia

AFTER A NUMBER OF SUCH ADVENTURES—and others concerned with the hospitable intentions of Afghans and our own mistakes—we reached Mazar-i-Sherif. It was the Moslem New Year, a season of pilgrimage. From all over Asia, from Arabia and the Indian Ocean, the heretical Faithful had come to visit Ali under the sea-water-blue of his noblest mosque. In the early morning its domes are ice-blue like glaciers in shadow. At noon they achieve a ferocity of colour emphasized by contrast with the surrounding earthen roofs and walls bleached by the sun. In the background there is almond blossom and the tawny gold of the desert. Far away, north of the Oxus river, the first ranges of Soviet Turkestan rise blinding white against a curious clarity of sky. To the south are the heaped metallic ranges of the Hindu Kush. On our

arrival, I remember nothing but desperate satiety. For George and I had just finished an afternoon meal—sitting very comfortably in a ditch, with a garden spread round us like a Persian carpet—when an official deputation appeared with an invitation to a banquet. Until that moment I had been completely happy. It was warm, the sun shone. There was plenty to eat. The bank fitted admirably into my back. George buttered things and found things which I dropped and quoted the incomparable Ling, a Chinese philosopher who was never out of countenance, even when partially hanged.

The tea, of course, tasted like brackish water, but the mountains made up for it. I did not quite believe in them—they were too perfect. When the door of the garden opened and Kuli Khan precipitated himself through it, followed by a procession of unsuitable figures, I thought they were all part of the illusion.

Kuli Khan tried to speak before he reached us, but misery had made him inaudible. With agonized eyes he stood over us and besought us to rise. "It is the great," he said. "They were expecting you. The Foreign Minister had sent news. A magnificent lunch is prepared——" Breathlessly, he enumerated the courses, while with his body he tried to hide the traces of our meal. There was a great deal of it spread about the ditch and scattered over our persons. An egg had burst upon my skirt. George was smeared with over-ripe banana.

Making a feeble effort to alter my posture, which was definitely that of reclining, I upset several tea-pots. Kuli Khan looked as if he were about to burst into tears, but George succeeded in rising not only to his feet, but to the occasion. Imperceptibly, he left the ditch. In exquisite Persian, he addressed the deputation, which stood knee-deep in the lucerne trying not to express its dismay. After the first blameless periods, I began to wonder if George ever *had* been in the ditch. A few crumbs clung to him. There was mud on his shoulders, but his manner successfully conveyed the impression of a favour bestowed. The deputation relaxed. They began to make gestures indicative of welcome. George, splendidly ignoring the tatters of cold mutton about his feet, implied a hunger that could only be satisfied by the feast provided for us.

In another moment we should be headed for the official residence. Protesting, I looked at my watch. A scandalized Kuli Khan begged me to hide it. "There is no time here——" he said, removing all that I still hoped to eat.

George held out a hand. The movement did not interfere with his speech, which flowed mellifuously over such matters as our appreciation of the Foreign Minister's courtesy and the uncertainties of travel both in England and Afghanistan. Ignominiously I was hauled out of the ditch. Kuli Khan made desperate attempts to brush food and mud from my clothes. In an effort to retrieve my hat he stood upon it. This destroyed my usual sense of proportion. With the feelings of a savage

at the Court of Queen Victoria, I followed George, who looked clean, cool and assured.

Ten minutes later we had been driven in considerable state to an admirable white building set most effectively in a garden, and placed at the end of a table loaded with flowers and sweets. "Can't you do anything to save us?" I asked. But George ignored my plea, while he expressed the utmost appreciation of all that had occurred to us.

Beyond the walled garden orchards foamed with blossom. Farther away the sands swelled into hundreds of smooth, egg-shaped dunes, and beyond these again the gold of the desert spread to the sheer red hills. It was a lovely view and I turned to it for relief from the food continuously pressed upon us. It was excellent food, but we had already overeaten.

Course followed course. With the hospitality for which Afghanistan is famous, our hosts offered us not a choice, but an accumulation of rich substances. I did my best, and George surpassed anything that could be expected of a limited human capacity. He devoured plov. He absorbed tea. Hours later, when stiffened by repletion I staggered to my feet, he rose, a trifle damp perhaps, but otherwise unmoved and—still making the correct remarks—moved with agility and suppleness towards the door I thought I should never reach.

Somehow we climbed into the lorry. George bowed from the waist. How he contrived that movement I cannot imagine.

Outside the garden, where orange lilies blazed, the road degenerated. At the first bump, I pleaded to be allowed to walk. "*Could* you?" asked George with an expression of awe.

In mid-desert we saw a deserted tomb. With one accord we urged the driver towards it. Kuli Khan protested in vain. The earth was flat, though hard. On it, in the shelter of a wall, we extended ourselves. Speechless, we considered our state.

Shadows lengthened. Camels, with tufts of feathers standing up like brooms on the saddle pommels, plodded past. Doubtless they averted their supercilious eyes. There were no foot-passengers. Every man rode, either upon the rump of a donkey or astride a small, shaggy horse. Russia had come to Afghanistan, for these Turkoman riders wore knee-boots and immense fur hats. They were bundled in a multitude of wadded coats, with rifles slung across their shoulders.

In despair, Kuli Khan stood over us. He said, "If you would not spend the night in the desert, you must go—you will freeze, you will be eaten by wild beasts, you will be murdered——" He could not think of anything else equally improbable, so he stopped with his mouth still open.

"Oh, why did they get us out of that ditch?" I murmured.

"After all," said George, strictly reasonable, "it would probably annoy us if distinguished foreigners expected at the Guildhall insisted on picnicking in a drain somewhere in the Mile End Road."

Mazar-i-Sherif, erroneously supposed by Central Asian Shias to be the burial-place of Sherif Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohamed, is two hundred years older than Samarkand. It is untouched by modernity—or by what we call progress. No wars have spilled destruction upon the cherished perfection of its sacred buildings. Each tile is perfect—and of that heart-breaking azure which we cannot now produce. I never saw the minarets rising—far bluer than the sky—above a froth of fruit blossom and the flat, sun-scorched roofs, without a quickening of the pulses.

For me, Mazar-i-Sherif is still something of a dream. In the daytime we bargained for caraculi skins, attended by a frantic Kuli Khan exclaiming, "In all the world there is not sufficient salt to cure them!" or, "Is this a reasonable way of buying mutton for your dinner?" In the evenings we wandered about the great fair which spread over the market-place. We watched jugglers. We subsidized fighting partridges and bribed conjurers to extravagant feats. We drank endless bowls of tea seated upon carpeted wooden couches outside the *khanés*. We listened to story-tellers or discussed Russian-Afghan trade with merchants who could cross the frontier as they chose. George translated Persian or Pushtu for my benefit.

When I left him—to drive and ride north across the Northern Afghan desert—I felt deprived of speech. And this feeling went on with me across the Oxus river—on board a Russian petrol barge—across a good deal of Uzbekistan to Bokhara. For I could talk neither Russian nor Uzbek. In time I learned a few words of the latter and a little Tadjik, but I rarely knew exactly what I was saying. Judging from the expressions of my new friends, it must often have been startling.

Bokhara—in 1936—was an amazing combination of old and new. The mosques and the *madrasahs* which had made it an Asian Rome were crumbling into the dust. Of the fifteen hundred universities, schools and sacred buildings described by sixteenth and seventeenth century travellers—with all their glory of ceramics—hardly a dozen remained. The Tower of Death, monument to the cruellest dynasty of history, still soared like some savage desert lily over the ancient city built of mud. But the flowery delicacy of tiling and fresco was peeling from walls and towers belonging to the golden age of Tartary and of the caravan trade from China to India. On the other side of the citadel—until 1921 the stronghold of barbaric Emirs, now the offices of a Government at once National and Soviet—spread the modern town. It was practical, but not aesthetic. Silk-mills and cotton plants, factories, clubs, houses of culture, water-tanks and storage buildings, a theatre and a communal lodging-house owed much to red, corrugated iron.

At Bokhara, towards nightfall, I arrived upon a cotton-truck. The driver assured me—in the limited words we shared—"Yes, yes, I will find you somewhere to sleep. Myself I have a bed. Fortunately it is

large. If it comes to the worst——” In the thick dust upon the wind-screen he drew a bed of ample proportions and made cheerful kindly gestures intended to be reassuring.

After much driving and much talk with helpful citizens, I was deposited in a lodging-house kept by a young Jewess with blue-black plaits hanging to her waist, and a shawl of many colours. She was beautiful, with a face of finest ivory and a bitter mouth. For twelve roubles she hired me a bed, not a room. By my watch it was 6.15 p.m., but already dark. “Comrade,” I ventured, “could I perhaps buy something to eat?”

It seemed to me that I had not properly eaten since—several days ago—I had finished the last provisions provided most generously by George and with the utmost reluctance by Kuli Khan.

“In the bazaar,” said the daughter of that famous race—the Bokharan Jews. By what means she made me understand this, I do not remember, for she knew no European language, not even Russian—of which I could by then contrive a few sentences repeated parrot-wise, so that people knew what I wanted, but rarely could I understand their replies.

Calculating that the nearest bazaar must be two miles distant, I decided that a bath would have to take the place of a meal. Apart from the soot-filled pannikins of Mazar and the buckets full of mysterious fluid which George had conjured from the villages of the Kush, I had not had a bath since leaving Bamian. So it was with delight that I discovered at the end of the passage an enormous tin coffin with a tap at either end. The door leading to this paradise would not lock. Undeterred, I shed my clothing—the dirtiest of shirts and a skirt whose brown had become grey. The water was ice-cold and there was no plug to the bath, but, completely happy, I stood at one end of it, soaping vigorously and pouring spongefuls of water over my shoulders. Footsteps approached. I protested—in English, Russian and what I thought might possibly be ‘Central Asian’. The door opened. There entered an enormous Uzbek in a flowered chapan girt with pistols, knives and, so far as I could see in the guttering light, a considerable amount of household ironmongery. Clutching the sponge as a buckler, I begged him immediately to leave. Instead, he hung coat and shirt over the top of the partition. Booted, he got into the bath. “Do not disturb yourself, Comrade,” he said, or I supposed he said, for he spoke in Uzbek. “I will use the other tap.”

This he proceeded to do, an intricately embroidered cap on his head, his legs in solid leather, the rest of him bare.

Ignoring me completely, he had a good wet shower, gargled majestically, spat in all directions and offered me his soap when mine slithered under the bath. He also proffered something which I took to be a comb until I noticed it was without teeth. With this same implement he scratched his back vigorously. When I left he called after me what



1. In Travancore. Coconut refreshment on the way

2. In the Libyan desert—as the Sitt Khadija

3. In an Arab house—the Sitt Khadija orders new clothing

4. In Tripoltanis—and by mistake—a tidal wave.

OFF THE MAP





1 In Egyptian frontier desert (with Colonel Forth)

2 Pleasure in the Sahara

3 In Antibes with Rosalind Norman

4 World's end in Patagonia

5 At a farm on the bush veldt in the Transvaal with a Witch Doctor

6 In Brioni

WHERE THE STRANGEST
ROADS GO DOWN



I imagined to be the local equivalent of 'Good luck' or the Afghan 'Go without trouble'.

Back in the dormitory, I found the modern form of Uzbek—black blouse, zipp-fastened, shiny leather belt, trousers dark and very narrow, satchel and black cap—seated on the next bed to mine, examining his bare toes. Two other young men were bent over the table, looking for matches and arguing, apparently, as to who had lost them. An old woman was giving them a piece of her mind. She held a glass of muddy brown liquid, bearing some resemblance to tea.

Draped in a wholly unsuitable dressing-gown of black satin patterned with storks, I bore down upon her and asked for food. The bare-footed youth understood. He explained at length to his companions. Other young people came in. A very old man, grey, hairless, hollow, was extracted from some cubby-hole. "Give him a rouble for two eggs," instructed the first black blouse in German, "and another rouble—that will buy a couple of breads—twenty kopeks for tea and, yes, eighty kopeks for himself. He will have to walk a long way——"

"Lak-lak!" suddenly enunciated the old woman, who had remained mute during the discussion. She flung herself upon my dressing-gown and held up a fold upon which a green and white stork flew furiously with yellow legs extended. She would have dragged me to the window to show me the nests of 'lak-laks' upon every roof and every broken minaret, but the second black blouse was fingering the silk. "Artificial," he pronounced, for he was floor-foreman in Bokhara's biggest silk factory and therefore interested in quality and design, "but it is original. We cannot yet make such large patterns."

Realizing that a technical discussion would now inevitably ensue, I left the dressing-gown to its critics and got into bed. The sheets were coarse and clean. I used my own pillow. It was too hot to need anything else.

After I'd been asleep for what seemed to me hours, an earthquake happened, and I woke to find one of the young men, still black-bloused, shaking my shoulder. Food had arrived. So also had a girl with a scar which lifted her upper lip and made of her quite ordinary prettiness something unusual and arresting. She sat on the end of my bed while I ate one good white roll and one egg boiled hard as wood and drank hot water faintly brown and equally faintly tea-flavoured.

The three black blouses gathered round. The one who spoke a few words of German interpreted at length. I learned that the girl drove a lorry for one of the cotton farms. The men who had been looking for matches were respectively a teacher and a curator at the new museum.

"Are you a doctor?" they asked.

Realizing that I must have some profession in this earnest, new Asia, I replied, "A student."

The term, vague as it was, satisfied my companions. For it is still

the ardent desire of Russian or Russianized Asian youth to study. It does not matter what—so long as it leads to a university, or to those night classes which impair the health of already overwrought shock workers in factories and farms.

When I next went to sleep it was to the reiteration of the number of new buildings in Bokhara, where nothing should ever be new. I dreamed of Vámbéry who, disguised as a pilgrim in turban and long dust-coloured robe, wandered through the old city and read the Koran on the steps of the Chir Arab *madrasah*—in the days when the infidel who set foot within the holy portals of Bokhara lost his tongue and his eyes before he was, most mercifully, permitted to lose his life.

About all this journey and its extraordinary mixture of the very old and the very new, I wrote for the *Daily Telegraph* and also in a book called *Forbidden Road to Samarkand*.¹ But at the time I must have been under the influence of Peter Fleming's 'debunkery'. For, re-reading the account of that lawless journey with no 'milk and honey' of a common tongue to smooth my way, I find no mention of fear. This seems to me—now—ridiculous and also unwarranted. For of course I was afraid. I had no right to be in Bokhara. There was nobody there to explain my good intentions or to report my fate. Nobody could have been blamed if I had been absorbed into some Asian prison—as into the maw of an octopus. There, I could have disappeared. For not a soul knew where I was. Had I got myself into trouble Moscow and London would have been equally—and rightly—oblivious.

It was not a pleasant thought. It haunted my nights. At times I took sleeping tablets to ensure some hours' cessation from fear. But in the days I generally enjoyed myself. For—with limited speech—I succeeded in making friends among the truck-drivers, teachers, cotton and silk operatives who crowded the lodging-house. With them I visited the new, Russianized Bokhara and was impressed by the same lusty sensation of growth and effort which I had known in the industrial cities of the North.

Among the young people enthusiasm was unbounded. I remember a typical day. About 6 a.m. a thirty-year-old professor who spoke German took me to see the new schools. After an hour or two, it occurred to me that I was hungry. I inquired of my companion if he had any ideas about food. He said, "In your country you must eat a lot," and his flat Uzbek features registered reproach. Diffidently, I mentioned my predilection for breakfast, but the young man went on talking. "In every street there used to be a mosque. Now most of them are schools——"

He led me into one of the largest. Boys and girls looked equally healthy and as happy as any other young people conscious of agree-

¹ Published first by Cassell in London, then by Penguin under title *Russian Road to India*, and by Dutton in U.S.A.

able opportunity. I looked with interest at all this new and useful material which the Soviet system had produced by putting an end to the Moslem seclusion of women—and thus altering the entire pattern of human relationship. It must be remembered that Islam in Central Asia was imposed at the sword's point upon lazy and peaceful peoples indifferent to all things unconnected with their flocks and herds, whereas in parts of India and Africa—as in Arabia—it is the core of the people's living. It could not, I think, be changed as easily as in Russian Turkestan. Yet throughout my journey—from Termez, outpost of civilization on the Oxus river, to Tashkent, capital of the vast new cotton lands—I was recurrently impressed by the change in point of view, spiritual, mental and material, effected in one generation.

In that big school in Bokhara, I saw girls in shorts and shirts, studying with boys of their own age and with young men taking technical courses. A few years ago these girls, blinded by stiff, horsehair veils,¹ would have been picking their way through the dirt of bazaars which could never be more to them than a striped and shadowed mass. Most of them, at thirteen and fourteen, would already have been mothers, their babies diseased if they had not died at birth. All of them would have been the witless and helpless possessions of men, perhaps three or even four times their age, whom they had never seen until their wedding night. The boys would have been free of that tortured world where, under the Emirs, slavery, polygamy and sodomy flourished—with the making of eunuchs and those strange associations which, in womanless Islam, send men walking hand in hand with flowers behind their ears.

Now they were all discussing the local sports in which teams of both sexes were to compete. The boys wore loose Russian blouses, white or black, belted above their narrow trousers. In defiance of custom, their heads were bare and their hair was cut in European fashion.

The girls were neatly shingled and they wore overalls of gaily-coloured prints. They looked strong and well fed, which reminded me of my own emptiness.

Determinedly, I addressed the young Professor who was confiding to me the details of the curriculum. "I'm awfully sorry, but it's no use my trying to listen till I've had something to eat."

He looked at me with a mixture of amazement and horror. "Did you say you were hungry?" he faltered, as if he scarcely liked to voice so shameful a question.

"I did—and I am—very, very hungry."

"But you must eat, then! What would you like? There is everything, everything——"

He glanced, somewhat wildly, at a counter on which eggs, bread

¹ The chadour.

and glasses of sour milk were displayed. The 'everything' resolved itself into a combination of these. I ate voraciously.

It was then, after some discussion, conceded to be ten o'clock. Determined not to starve further, I bought another roll for twenty kopeks and two eggs for eighty.

The professor, who had already offered to make me a present of his day, regardless of what happened to his classes during his absence, kindly placed my purchases in his satchel among the papers he would correct that evening. After much talk with the pupils who, from the age of twelve upwards, all wanted to know about the wages and the living conditions of British workmen, and some conversation with the director, who already in the early summer of 1936 was concerned with the possibility of a war with Russia, France and England on one side, Germany and Japan on the other, we regained the street.

"Now," said the Professor cheerfully, "we must walk."

Walk we did. In fact we hardly stopped walking—under a blazing sun, in a temperature which at noon reached 96° Fahrenheit. There was nothing else to do.

First we went to the Citadel. There I acquired more friends. The officials who, if municipal, were Uzbeks—slow, solid and cautious—and if political were Russian, or half Russian, quicker, more authoritative and with a more imaginative friendliness, all seemed gratified that a stranger had taken so much trouble to visit Bokhara. The first demand for my passport caused me considerable unease, for I visualized at best an ignominious ejection, but the bar-sinister in the form of that ominous word 'transit' had been obliterated. The only untoward occurrence was when somebody leaned upon the Professor's satchel, and my reserve of eggs, erroneously believed to have been hard-boiled, burst over his papers.

"It does not matter at all," he said as he wiped up the sticky yellow mess with official blotting-paper, using the nearest pen to separate the more important documents. "How could such a small thing matter?"

Greatly impressed, I followed the Professor over what seemed to me the whole of Bokhara. At one moment we had a slight misunderstanding. From an official roof we were gazing at the miracle of the old town—its ruins a fading glory of blue and delicate celandine yellow. In front of the towers and still exquisite but broken domes rose a hideous corrugated iron roof. Ignoring it, I murmured "Lovely"—and was pleased when the Professor agreed. "Yes, it's a grand sight." He spoke with heartfelt satisfaction, and I reproached myself for having considered him a vandal. "Progress is always lovely," he added in the tone of rhapsody with which all young Russia—mighty both in its enthusiasms and in its ignorance—speaks of its own creation. Then I realized he was talking of the new, electric power-house.

After a very long while, we reached the street of the cooks. "I am

hungry," said my companion, surprised. By this time we had collected a friendly Armenian who spoke Arabic. So conversation flowed. "Shall we eat plov?" asked one of the men. My mouth watered.

But alas, no plov was ready. "For," explained the first expert to whom we addressed ourselves, "how can I cook sweet mare's flesh and rice, with currants and spices and all else that you wish until I know how many people will eat it?"

"Can you not make for three?" begged the Professor, while I poked him firmly in the ribs and said, "Mutton, not horse."

Dust caked my throat and turned my voice into a raucous whisper.

"Er—what?" asked the Professor.

"Sheep," I repeated, "he must make it of sheep."

"Mutton is very expensive," protested the Professor, but he evidently consulted the purveyor of plov, for the greasy man turned and glared at me. Words rushed from him. "He says the mare died of a very healthy disease," translated the Professor, with some bewilderment. "And it does not matter anyhow, for he will not make for less than six. Come with me. We must find eaters."

The Armenian had already buttonholed a peasant who looked as if he could eat a sheep at a sitting, but after pinching his large stomach he said it was too early—plov tasted better at night.

Having walked the length of the street, we found a wizened cook, who agreed to make mutton plov "with a sheep so young that it would melt like the sin of the True Believer when his tongue tasted alcohol," but he could not possibly waste so rare a delicacy upon less than eight people.

We mustered five, including an Afghan exile who spoke Persian and a Cossack from the Caucasus whose Circassian mother had taught him Arabic, but the cook could not be persuaded. "It is greed, not hunger, which would make you eat before the sun sinks. Come back with the night and I will make you a poem"—he gestured beautifully with fingers petal-smooth—"a delight—a sin——" We left him still describing the plov and went in surly silence through the bazaar.

"Truly, it *is* early," said the Professor.

"Four o'clock at least," I said.

The five of us were still together, for the Professor, who loved company, could not bear to disperse the little gathering. It evidently appealed both to his gregarious Uzbeg nature and to that more intensive friendliness which Sovietization induces in simple natures. "We will go to my house and drink tea," he said.

The suggestion delighted me, for I could not believe that we should be expected to drink in a vertical position, and I longed for nothing more than to sit down. I calculated that altogether I had been walking and talking, without other respite than the pause in the school, for between seven and nine hours.

In the following days, most of my small adventures in Uzbeistan

were concerned with food—generally, alas, with its absence. For the active Bokharans and the Russians from whom they were learning to work and to live on a modern scale, never ate at regular—or reasonable—hours. When they could no longer endure hunger, they went in groups, happily gregarious, to the bazaars. Or they sent some half-demented scarecrow—relic of an earlier régime—to buy glasses of tea and dusty cakes or pastries. As there was no transport of any kind except the trucks belonging to distant cotton farms, hours were wasted walking through the deep sand. I remember no shops where ordinary goods could be bought, but there was a co-operative in the main square, breaking into a garden, where for many times the European price tinned delicacies could be acquired with coupons. In the bazaars, there was some farm produce for sale and also goat's-hair material or leather goods made in the villages.

Bokhara was—at that time¹—extraordinarily interesting because it was still in the first stages of transformation. I remember a curious conversation with a ploughman on an experimental farm, which had been a palace. I found him asleep under an overturned tractor. When I insisted on being noticed, he rolled on to an elbow, stared, blinked, shut his eyes tight and said in excellent German, "I knew something like you would happen, but it was worth it."

"What?"

"The vodka, of course. I have never tasted better."

It took some time to convince him that I was in no way connected with a recent orgy. Perhaps the size and solidity of my foot in a golfing brogue contributed to his final conversion. Still recumbent, he gazed up at me and said, "Well, what do you want then?"

"To talk," I said, and without waiting to be discouraged I told him of my frantic efforts to converse in languages that I didn't know.

Slowly the young man responded. He had blue eyes and a shock of lint-coloured hair, but he would have been the better for washing and sleep. He said, however, that he could only talk when he was at his worst, and on this basis, with his shoulders propped against an up-turned wheel, he shared ideas, disconnected and inconsequential, but enchanting to me after the mixture of information and words with which the previous weeks had been surfeited. "I am only half a Russian," he said. "Yes, my mother was German, so if I find it difficult to believe in myself, which is one of the few Slavonic virtues, I can quite easily believe in anything else—you, for instance."

When he smiled I lost all contact with reality. In spite of the mud with which I was much spattered, I began to wonder if I were really sitting under a tractor in Uzbekistan, or—more suitably—leaning across a café table in Vienna watching a student make patterns out of a heap of words.

"You will have noticed," said my companion, settling his hip in a

¹ Late spring of 1936.

furrow, "that we Russians never finish anything. Yes, for the moment I am Russian. For us there is no present, only the past, immeasurably terrible, and the future, brilliant beyond conception. We assume, you see, that a building is finished as soon as it is begun, and we are impressing our characteristics on the Uzbeks. Hence the state of suspended animation which you observe in Bokhara. The population is increasing every month, and since no form of construction is ever completed, the result suggests an interrupted earthquake. Promising, but unsatisfactory, what do you think?"

I could not think. For I had become accustomed to words of at most two syllables enunciated with earnest violence. This unexpected rush of ideas left me breathless. During a pause I asked, "What are you doing here? Do you like it? Are you happy?"

The young man answered gravely, "We are a fantastic race—yes, yes, I am still Russian. We can give up anything, even a woman, for we could not be more unpossessive. The revolution, you know, did not really hurt us at all. We had had too much. In Imperial Russia there was unbelievable luxury—I can just remember it—and no comfort at all." When he opened his eyes fully, I saw how tired they were. He could not be so young after all. "There was extravagance such as it is hard now to imagine. We spent money for nothing. We threw it away and got nothing at all in return." His voice became dreamy. "I suppose that is it—we had so much that we could not possibly mind losing it." Another pause. "We start 15 per cent ahead of you because we are not afraid of misfortune, sorrow, terror. We do not even consider pain."

I interrupted. "Don't you consider happiness?"

With his eyes shut, the man who was not really so young meditated aloud. "We find happiness in the extent of our power to feel. Our gloom is a corridor, out of which we know we shall emerge. Yours is a dead end. You are so frightened of feeling, you cannot appreciate either joy or sorrow. You will not be unhappy, not even for a day or an hour, so you rob yourselves of the delights of contrast. What good use the Chinese painters make of black! Without shadow there is no value in colour."

At some point in this fantastic conversation I asked the man who really was not young at all why he lay in the mud and did nothing. He replied, "I think better when I am recumbent."

"Did you come to Uzbekistan to think?"

"No. That was the German side of me. It wanted to qualify as a mechanic and subsequently as a particle of the body corporate in the shape of this hideously uncomfortable but not more wasteful than the old—this new but not at all final Russia."

I suppose I also asked such futile things as if he enjoyed being a tractor driver, for he said, "But of course I am happy—and also unhappy. Thank God, however, I am not content. That is the nearest

you English get to joy. I remember, so long ago, when I was twenty, and the world, though full of cracks, had not yet burst, I asked about a woman at your Embassy, 'Is she happy?' I remember also the horrible answer, 'In any case, she is satisfied.'

Uncomfortably, I shifted in the mud. From a pocket full of oddments, the man, who was just thirty-nine, produced some loose black cigarettes. "Try one," he said. "They are, at least, intense," and then, "We Russians are really more fortunate than you, for if our homes are now empty, our minds are beautifully furnished——"

"The furniture must be uncomfortable, for none of you can bear to be alone."

"That is the first intelligent remark you have made," said the man in an even voice.

Feeling extraordinarily inadequate, in spite of the consciousness of being cleaner and more sober than my chance companion, I protested.

"But as a race, you are not sensible," he said. "Come now, you ask the wrong things of everyone—tolerance from Germany, reliability and patience from France, frankness from Russia, and heaven alone knows what you ask from a distraught India—your newspapers are too biased. But as human beings, you are just illogical." With mockery on his lips and exhaustion in his eyes, he concluded, "You ask that your husbands should be lovers and your lovers husbands. What more of folly could there be?"

After that I could only say, "Do you know England?"

"Not at all!" replied the surprising man. "And I find it a great advantage. One can so easily be disturbed by experience."

He continued to talk while subsiding deeper into the mud. When I left him, still talking, he had contrived to make a pillow of the clay which covered part of the tractor wheel. The rising wind was fast making a blanket for him out of the loose earth. I wondered how soon, or if ever, somebody would inquire about the condition of the machine and its driver. Then I remembered that 'there are no hours in the desert'.

CHAPTER IV

1936

Travelling 'Hard' to Samarkand. 'Something Bigger than History'

FROM BOKHARA TO SAMARKAND, I travelled 'hard'. In the U.S.S.R. this means the epitome of physical discomfort—but considerable entertain-

ment. The train averaged ten to fifteen miles an hour. Upon a wooden shelf, with Mongol fellow-passengers, bedding, baggage, teapots and young live-stock heaped around and on top of me, I journeyed for a day and a night. The train was twenty-four hours late. A Tadjik official assured me it was the best in the world. He had been to Moscow and felt himself a cosmopolitan. "There is no civilization outside the Soviet Union," he said.

It is no use arguing with this belief. I found it widespread between the frontiers of Afghanistan and of Finland. From south to north, from east to west, the young people of the Soviet Socialist Republics—avidly accepting what is in effect a new creed as well as a new social system—insist on their honest belief, "There is no good except in Russia." This would not be so hard to stomach, for apostles are apt to be unreasonable—yet are they justified by the sacrifices they make for their Faith? But it is too trying for ordinary human beings in the dirt, smell and discomfort of many Russian situations—trains, lodgings or sanitary arrangements—to be assured, "There is no comfort or progress outside the Soviet Union." The time has passed, I think, for such exaggerations. Russia can stand secure upon the solid foundations of what she has most worthily achieved—in character as well as in conditions of living. There is no need for pretences. Moscow has every right to say, "Where you were all blind, I saw clearly. I knew this war would come. So that my peoples could fight and endure, I had to make them hard. So that they might be armed, I had to turn agricultural races into artisans. I could not afford the time for comfort or the making of consumers' goods. While feet and hands could last, I had to use them to create the system which stood the strain of German attack." All this would be true. It would have the unassailable dignity of the inevitable. With my whole-hearted appreciation of Russia, I cannot understand why she must still live in blinkers. What will happen to the minds of her people after the war when they begin to travel—as surely, in time, they must? Will not all their beliefs be endangered, because those concerned with mythical conditions in other countries must—at the first sight of reality—be destroyed? Typical of all this, was the new hotel at Samarkand. "There is nothing like it in England," said the charming young officer who gave me a lift from the station. He was right, but not in the way he meant. By way of a promising staircase and vast echoing corridors, I was led—by a shambling, splay man of indefinite origin—to a slit of a room without carpet or curtains. It was furnished with a table and an iron bedstead. Cigarette ash lay thick on both. Litter covered the floor.

"Where can I wash?" I asked.

The spider man looked surprised, but he showed me a tap on the landing. I turned it. There was no water.

"You wash to-morrow," said my companion. He explained that there were five bathrooms in the hotel, but they could not be used unless

five people agreed to take baths at the same time in order to make it worth while to heat the water.

I asked for a bucket.

The sprawling man said, "To-morrow." So I went all over the building until I found some painter's tools, including an outsize tin. I took this back to my room. The Asian, convinced now that only so could he hope for peace, produced water in a leaking bucket. He also brought a broom, and we swept all that the previous tenant had left out on to the landing. When I asked for a lavatory, the Asian pointed first to the corridor and then to the street.

Having washed in half my precious water, I hung a blanket across the window, through which the morning sun and the eyes of Samarkand would stare from 5 a.m. onwards, tied the door-handle to the bottom rail of the bed with my scarf, and slept comfortably on top of my bedding.

At intervals during the night, people tried half-heartedly to come in, either in search of the receptacles I had purloined, or because they had already reserved that particular room. But the scarf held and they went amicably away. It occurred to me that it must be against the instincts of Central Asia to make any determined effort, especially after midnight.

Next morning I began my usual search for someone who could speak a familiar tongue. It was quite simple. I just walked down the main street, and whenever a person of superior appearance approached, I asked rapidly, "Sir—or Madam—do you speak——" whatever language seemed most suited to the looks of the particular citizen. Large, bull-necked, shorn and reddish men, with heavy folds of stomach, invariably spoke German. Wild, alert, rather pathetic young men burning themselves away, with red ties and a storm of hair, were often Spaniards. That morning in Samarkand I had immediate luck. For I found a student of philosophy who had learned Castilian—my grandmother's tongue—to be able to read Unamuno in the original. Sharing an enthusiasm for this famous evolutionary writer, we walked towards the admirable new town—and met a Jewish professor of biochemistry. He spoke French. "*Dieu merci!* I am saved," I exclaimed. That fervent "I am saved!" opened Samarkand for me. The delightful professor threw back his head and laughed. Then he asked me to stay with him and his family in a small mud house in the middle of a cherry orchard. So I made acquaintance with a typical Soviet household and its way of living.

The main room was furnished with a cupboard, six hard chairs and a table covered with linoleum. There were three other rooms. The seventy-year-old widow of a general occupied one of them, a mere slit in the wall, cumbered with the jetsam of her possessions. The Professor and his eldest son slept in the best bedroom, which was perhaps twelve feet square. The wife had an iron bed, which was never made,

in a corner of her husband's study. A carpet-covered divan, a large desk and piles of books took up the remaining space. The second son slept on a bench in the kitchen, with his feet straggling on to the stove. So, I suppose, did the elderly maid-servant, who received the equivalent of £36 a year, her working clothes and oddments of food, in return for a little sweeping and a good deal of washing, combined with all sorts of extraneous jobs, such as pig-killing, weeding and whitewashing. The lavatory was a hole opening out of the kitchen. There were no drains.

The Professor's wife was very agreeable. Robust and sensible, with rolls of fat round her hips and chin, she welcomed me warmly. Apparently she saw nothing surprising in having to put up a stranger at a moment's notice. She told me I could sleep—as soon as I liked—on the divan in the study. No mention was made of food. The family, I thought, must have eaten their lunch at four in the afternoon, and would not again feel hungry till somewhere near midnight, when they would have supper. My meals that day had consisted of a glass of sour junket at 10 or 11 a.m., three miniature apples in the middle of the afternoon, milkless tea and a spoonful of cherry jam at 6 p.m.

The Professor was keen and clever. As a Russian, he appreciated the magnitude of Soviet achievements among Uzbeks and Tartars in what had been the spiritual and social morass of feudal Central Asia. I remember one conversation—some time after midnight, I expect. The Professor said, "The people down here are amazingly adaptable. Ten years have changed the gutter imp, or the ignorant bundle of superstitions and superfluous clothing, who knew only the 'yurt'¹ life, who lived with animals and was preyed upon by them, into the polyglot doctor or technician, capable of holding his own in a capital city."

"Tell me," I asked, "when they've finished with the University, are all these young people content to live and work in what you label a 'backward region', or do they hanker after the big Russian towns?"

The Professor, who accepted his work as a mission, said, "There is a great deal of national spirit here. Uzbeks and Tadjiks are apt to feel they belong to their respective countries. They look upon the particular science they have learned as a religion which it is their duty to propagate. The best of them, no doubt, are too earnest, perhaps too narrow, but they will make a great fight for their factories and their farms. There is good, solid material among them."

"And the Russians?" I asked.

The Professor hesitated. "There is perhaps a new type, or a very old one, which does decidedly want amusement and the amenities of life. We have not many examples yet, but it is curious, with so much to do—with evolution, as it were, in our hands—that a few young men, generally the most intelligent and the most highly strung, should crave, not only for Moscow, but for what Europe might give to Moscow."

¹ The nomad Turkoman hut.

I noticed that the Professor, like the rest of his kind, spoke of 'Moscow' as if it were an island isolated from any other country or collection of countries.

My eyelids began to droop. I wanted so much to go on talking, but the heat of the room confused me. There was no air and a strong smell of fat came from the kitchen.

"We are building as fast as we can," said the Professor, "but there is not yet enough room for all the students. Education is compulsory, even among the nomads. In a few years we shall have enforced it, right up to the Chinese frontier."

"And you'll have work for everybody?" I asked, feeling my tongue clumsy.

"So long as we do not allow people to imagine they are entitled to work in any particular place. That is the danger of these subdivisions. Nationalism is all very well as an intellectual impetus, but an educated man—or woman for that matter—should feel himself a citizen of the whole Soviet Union. His home is with his work—and that may be anywhere between Harbin and the Ukraine."

"A trifle indefinite," I protested.

The Professor said, "A sixth of the world as their heritage, and it may be more—it must soon be more. Is that not enough for any man?"

And then my hostess intervened with, "It is no use talking to her. She is asleep."

Together we went into the study. Marta, as I always called her, helped me to spread my bedding on the divan. When I asked if I could wash, she led me into the kitchen, where her son was already asleep. A trickle of grey water spilled into the sink, which was full of scraps. The younger son's bare feet, very dirty, reached towards it. I cleaned my teeth, but postponed the problem of ablutions.

Back in the study, I tried to open a window, heavily barred, and was immediately frustrated by my hostess. She explained that thieves might come with long sticks and hook things off the desk.

Regretfully I resigned myself to the atmosphere, compounded of most known smells, and went at once to sleep. Hours later I was wakened by the Professor, who very kindly brought me a plate of red caviare. "We are having supper," he said, "and we thought you must be hungry." Voices and laughter came from the living-room. I could hear the thin tones of the seventy-year-old General's wife. It was then three o'clock.

Half asleep, but intensely grateful, I devoured the caviare. An hour or so later I woke again to find Marta going to bed. It was a simple process. She kicked away her shoes and took off the cotton slip which seemed to be her sole undergarment. Retaining the sleeveless black voile, the only dress I saw her wear night or day, she plumped up the pillow, rescued the plaid rug which had fallen behind the bed, and

without bothering to straighten the sheets, immediately fell asleep.

The days began late and they proceeded through a flow of small difficulties, punctuated by talk. I remember so well the first morning in the Professor's house. I woke to find sun streaming in at the window and the room empty. As I went to the kitchen in search of water, the eldest son of the house bowed to me with elegance from a rumpled bed with an enormous pink pillow at one end.

Frantic squeals came from the garden, where the elderly maid-servant, single-handed, was killing a pig. "Do not look! Do not listen!" exclaimed Marta, hurrying into the house. "That animal has been a friend of the family. We were all devoted to it. My husband is much affected! He said to our good Ilyna, 'Take thou the knife, I cannot use it.' Yes, you can have the water in that bucket. It was meant for cooking, but there may be a little more in the tap. It is simpler to go every six days to the town baths. That is what I do. Would you like some of the pig's liver with your tea?"

Back through the living-room and the son's bedroom I marched, carrying the bucket. With care, I turned up the study carpet, which was a good dark Merv, and washed with satisfaction in the surprisingly cold water, after which I made both beds and recklessly opened the window. When I re-entered the living-room, I found the General's wife, white-haired and seemingly bloodless, making coffee on a Primus at one end of the long table. With her attention concentrated on the saucepan, she ate a piece of cold tongue which had been wrapped in newspaper. Marta and the younger boy were drinking milkless tea and dividing a small herring. The Professor had propped a scientific journal against a jar and was making notes.

"You have not bought any bread?" queried my hostess. "Take some of ours——" She produced a loaf from the cupboard and cut off an enormous brown chunk.

"In 1933," said the General's widow, "when there was a great hunger and many died, a bread like that would have cost twenty-five roubles and eggs nearly as much. Now all is cheap. It is true one cannot yet live well, but one can get enough." French must once have been as familiar to her as Russian, but now she spoke it stiffly, as if her tongue could not move the heavy words.

While mother and son argued about the cutting up of the pig, whose screams had mercifully ceased, the General's widow showed me a photograph of a young man in the uniform of a Guards' officer. He was remarkably handsome. "Where is he now?" I asked.

"I do not know. Perhaps dead. I have not heard of him for eighteen years." With more assurance she spoke of her daughter, a librarian in Tashkent. "She enjoys her work. There is nothing wrong for her. She is of the new Russia. It is very strange——" The old lady appeared to be resigned. She was certainly unafraid. Before she left, bare-headed, with a dusty black shawl over her print dress, to

make the daily pilgrimage to the bazaars, she said, "It is so much better now. At last one can make oneself a life."

The Professor looked up from his journal of biochemistry to comment, "She is right. It is all so much better these last two years. Now one can have a good life. There is not nearly so much propaganda and a great deal more comfort."

I repeated my contention about the children. "You spoil them so thoroughly—how will they endure the discomforts which you grown-ups take as a matter of course?"

"Youth is our most effective weapon," retorted the Professor, pushing back his shock of dark hair.

We argued on familiar lines and I discovered that my host—like so many of the intellectuals working in Central Asia, a Jew—regarded his origin as neither racial nor religious. He was the most detached Jew I have ever met. He said, "We Hebrews have a special type of brain. That is all. It is, I think, manipulative rather than creative. We can make use of the circumstances by which you are defeated."

With his elbows on the hideous linoleum cover, he talked of Russia, which he saw as a symbol of evolution. He said, "The past has gone. The present does not really count, except in so far as it affects the future. We are making something bigger than mere history." In this, I think he was right.

Later, as we walked towards the great avenue and the University, he became practical. "We need more specialists and we can afford to pay them. Even now a professor may earn fifteen hundred or seventeen hundred and fifty roubles a month, and if his wife works as well—in an intellectual capacity—she can earn at least a thousand. One of my friends is a gynaecologist. He gets two thousand roubles a month from the hospital and another seventeen hundred and fifty as a visiting specialist, besides which he holds night classes and is well paid for them."

At the rate of twenty roubles to the pound, I computed that the said specialist must earn about three thousand English pounds a year.

"The Government is building a new type of house for specialists. Each will have six rooms, including the kitchen, and there will be a bathroom and even a servant's room."

So the terrors and the ideals of Communism are giving way to a Socialism rendered elastic by the need of experts.

So interesting was the new and growing Samarkand—instinct with the purpose of Russia, proud of its own nationalism yet intent on federation within the U.S.S.R.—that I had little time for the city of Tamerlane. Yet in the evenings, sometimes, I climbed to the top of the incomparable Gur Emir.¹ On a ledge beneath the blue dome, I sat upon fallen bricks and gazed across shadowy poplars to the roofs of the old town. Above them, flat against the horizon, rose the mosques

¹ The tomb of Tamerlane—'the Emir'.

and *madrasahs* of the Registan. When the 'Silk Road' bore the commerce and the learning of civilized Asia to the new plutocracy of Europe, this was the most celebrated square in the world. Tamerlane began it on an imperial pattern. The adjoining mosque of Bibi Khansoum, where the 'iron cripple's' wife is buried, must surely be the largest tomb in the world. But the Tartar masons used bad material. To-day the earthen walls and columns, the great domes and the lovely delicate tiles are crumbling back into the generic dust of the Asian plains.

To Tashkent I went—to see the vast, new cotton-schemes—and so north into Russia. It was too long a journey to describe now in detail. But one incident I particularly remember—in the G.P.U. office near the big railway station at Tashkent. As they never took the slightest interest in my passport—rendered blameless by diverse official scrawls—I had lost my fear of the 'three letter police'. In Central Asia, they had never seen a 'tourist', but they enjoyed students—and were proud of a foreigner. By this time I looked sufficiently battered—having only what I wore or could carry—to pass for an earnest scholar. So it became with me a habit to appeal to the G.P.U. when the natural difficulties—inseparable from Russian living and still more from Russian travel—became intolerable. In Tashkent I could find no lodging, so to an elderly police officer who could speak German, I appealed—when my feet would carry me no farther. He was a fatherly person, grey and tired, with pouched lids. "I want somewhere to sleep," I said. It was noon. "Now?" he asked, surprised. I thought I had better say "Yes". Otherwise the question of a bed might be indefinitely postponed, while relays of new acquaintances took me to see more and more of Tashkent. "Are you sick?" asked the officer anxiously.

"Not at all," I replied. "Only tired." Then I remembered that, throughout the Soviet Republics, I had never heard anyone acknowledge that he—or she—was tired.

While I sat expectant upon the couch, a gentle discussion drifted round me. Where could I find lodging? With a professor at the college? Or would one of the secretaries at the Sovnarkom share her room?

On the other side of a partition a small crowd was gathering. In a red rage which nobody seemed to mind, a hairless man beat upon the barrier. A golden youth lifted his voice and shouted, while tears streamed down his face. A girl leaned mute and sullen against the wall, and her thin clothes showed the perfection of her body.

"Please tell me what's happening. They all look so miserable. Can't you do anything?" I appealed to the grey officer, who might have been deaf and blind so far as the uproar beyond the partition was concerned.

"It is nothing at all," he replied. "The bald man is a street hawker, and we have suspended his licence because he was overcharging. The

boy is a friend who offers to go surety for him in the future, but he has no money or position. The girl, I think, wants to pay the fine if there is one, but nothing is yet decided."

"Oh!" said I, feeling very flat. There was no other comment I could make. But the hairless man suddenly raised his fists and charged full tilt for the door, whose upper panels were of glass. I expected a terrific smash, followed by most forms of violence, but two policemen effectively came to life. Before he had broken more than a chair which impeded his progress, they had seized the hairless man by the arms and bundled him out of the office. Outside, I could see one of them patting him on the back while he wept with fury, and the other lighting a cigarette.

As for me, I was told to go to the Sovnarkom and ask for a certain secretary who spoke French. She would most certainly provide a bed, but—the officer looked at a wrist-watch—it would be better to go later, after the meal hour.

So I got into a red tram and went on and on in it till I saw a café replete with little tables at which a crowd of men and women were eating. I had not seen so many people feeding since I had left Afghanistan, and it was with triumph that I realized I had at last caught up with the recognized hour for food.

With the fundamental reality of Russia, perhaps I have never caught up, for the surface is sufficiently contradictory to confuse the most sympathetic observer. From south to north, I saw the industrial and military preparations which made possible the remarkable defence against Germany. I saw also the extent of the sacrifices ordinary people, young and middle-aged, were making—then, in peace-time—in order to ensure, not their own security, but the eventual efficiency of a system which had become to them a religion. For—as I saw it, outside the great cities familiar to Europe—life was still, in 1936, generally speaking without comfort, leisure, gaiety or privacy. There were none of the rewards of labour recognized and considered necessary in Western Europe. There was plenty of education and information. There was hygienic instruction and some practice. But of pleasure, as we know it—a compound of leisure and specific amusement, with all the appurtenances of transport, food, clothing, make-up and general frivolity—there was none. Terror seemed to me to have diminished and needs to have increased. I met many young people who wanted more—more clothes, more food, more means of getting about, more fun, even more possessions. But as they did not know the rest of Europe had these, their wants were not acute enough to be called 'discontent'. I never met any who objected to the quality and quantity of work demanded of them. On the whole, I believe Russia was far more aware of 'appointment with destiny' than the rest of Europe. Even if—at times—they grumbled, her people were willing to do without 'butter', in the form of wheels instead of feet and of consumers' goods,

if they could be assured of 'guns' for the defence of all they had created. Of this creation they were invariably—and justly proud.

CHAPTER V

1937

Search for My Own Future. Kenya. Tanganyika on Coronation Day

FOR SOME YEARS Arthur and I had been talking about where we would spend our 'old age'. Neither of us wanted to live permanently in England. We thought it would be fun to have a large empty space, somewhere in the sun, and build—in the middle of it—a house to satisfy the diverse kinks in our natures. Whenever I imagined the future, it was full of horses. After returning from Southern Russia, farming was tacked on to it as well. I had been very much impressed by the 'days of creation' in Soviet Central Asia, where thousands of leagues had been turned from grain to cotton. I wanted to start from the beginning with land straight from Genesis and see what I could make of it.

Naturally, we thought of Kenya. Many of our friends had helped to make the colony—for good or ill. All my life I had known the fabulous Idina Sackville who made a habit of marrying whenever she fell in love. Apart from the difficulty of keeping up with her husbands, which included the late Euan Wallace, and Lord Erroll recently murdered by 'persons unknown', Dina was—and is—a delight to her friends. She has all the Brassey vitality—shared in full measure by her aunt, Lady Willingdon. She is preposterously—and secretly—kind. She is good to look at and also good company. So when we decided it was time to search for our wild land in the sun, we went to stay with Dina. At the moment she was between husbands—having parted from a pleasant person in the wholesale shirt trade and not yet wedded the delectable pilot of to-day. It was 1937—Coronation Year. After a surfeit of parties, we let our greedy London house to the Maharajah of Jaipur with whom I had stayed in India. For six months we were free of possessions. It was a delightful feeling and it lasted all the way to Nairobi. At the famous M'thaiga Club, ten minutes after we arrived, Alistair Gibb, a successful Kenya farmer, now soldiering in the Mediterranean, gave us lunch—and advice. I thought him pompous. He thought me intolerable. With relief we parted—Arthur and I determined to make as many mistakes as we chose, in our own way and on our own land.

On the edge of a plain, corn-gold but without any corn, Dina, who

is an extraordinary mixture of sybarite and pioneer, had built an entrancing one-story house round a courtyard. It was the last word in comfort, and it was clever too—in the way the rooms fitted. So many houses look as if they had come out of a rag-bag. They are all bits and pieces. Their owners say they are 'homely' and like a patchwork quilt, I suppose. But I think a house should be planned like a coat and skirt. It should have correct proportions. It should fit and suit the people who are going to live in it. Dina's low grey house on rising ground above the tawny plain fulfilled all these conditions. It was welcoming and at the same time mysterious—as is the way of satisfactory houses. The enclosed court gave me the idea for Unicorn Cay,¹ but I added two pepper-pot towers at the entrance and—for more light and air—removed the arcade which, in Dina's house, links the rooms as if it were a passage.

Too many people have already written about Kenya—with its extremes of frivolity and hard labour. I was only there for two months. Like others, I danced and camped and rode. Like some others, I did not drink. So I did not see the wild life which, when the 'happy valley' first received its name, led to such intricacies of personal relationship. But I did see the excellent work done by farmers—celebrated or unknown. With respect and envy I realized the extent of the brains, energy and patience put into the unresponsive or too responsive land. The result I thought remarkable. Had I been still in the twenties, nothing would have prevented me settling in Kenya. But it seemed to me an avid country. It needed the extremes of youth, strength, confidence and even conceit to cope with its storms and winds, its droughts and insect plagues. It needed twelve hours hard each day—in the service of its herds and crops. That year I must have felt lazy, for I agreed with Arthur that sea was preferable to bush and citrus to pyrethrum. All the same we very nearly bought land. With Dina we rode a long way across Sir John Ramsden's undimensional estates. Playing with the idea of a few thousand acres, we even planned the site of a house. But for each of us—and probably in each—there was something lacking. Arthur liked polo and hunting, but he did not want to spend most of the future upon a horse. This would have contented me, but I had not inherited the family passion for cattle. I loathed the long rainy season, in which the heavens opened and the earth was obliterated. I was not sure that Kenya had not reached the midway stage between savagery and sophistication where conditions are uneasily balanced—to the discomfort of anchorite and hedonist alike. Up-country, no doubt, there is material to be shaped, but on the pleasant farms where I stayed there was an English country-house atmosphere too reminiscent of my unhappy childhood to be redeemed by unlimited horses—and the whole contents of the zoo outside. To Arthur I said, "We are not young enough." I meant we had not

¹ Built in 1939-40 in the Bahamas.

enough crude faith in ourselves. Privately I thought, "We must go farther, much farther, right back to the beginning of the earth."

Kenya is lovely, but she is no longer primitive. Kenya is successful. She is—at times—extremely prosperous. She is very wet—in all senses of the word. Most of her is so high up that excesses can be attributed to nerves. She is laborious or casual according to individual character. But I rarely found her simple. And after all the complications of an international life—between two wars destructive as the biblical vengeance of Jehovah—I want simplicity.

In Kenya I remember a lake covered with flamingo. We were staying with the Longs¹ and had motored over a plain covered with zebra and buck. It had all seemed very improbable. For the profusion of wild animals was as a garden of the newest rich. I had never imagined so many animals out of an ark. Then we saw a flash of rose-red and palest pink. Out of still water rose what seemed to be tulips. The heavy-headed flowers were stiff and still, crowded like Dutch fields in spring. As we approached, stealthily on foot, the tulips turned into birds. There they stood—thousands and thousands of them—meditatively each upon one leg. Their wings were folded, close as the best petals. Most delicately flaming they were, with the gentler colour of sea-pinks upon their pinions. It looked as if they could never move, but suddenly the outside ranks wheeled up—sideways into the air. There was a long streak of black as their wings unfolded. Wave after wave followed—rising at the only possible angle. The manoeuvre was executed with the precision of a regiment of Guards on parade. But it was silent. We had seen no signal. Yet in two or three minutes the lake was deserted and a living sunset blazed across the sky.

My memories of Kenya are all connected with birds or animals. With Genesta Long, extravagantly picturesque in a cart-wheel hat and brilliant shirts, we rode in the early mornings among herds of game. Most of the creatures cherished by Noah seemed to have bred upon that plain. Nothing could have been more delightful. I thought of them all as toys and felt I was back in the nursery. Fortunately we met no black rhino—and the hippopotamus preferred their baths to us.

With Jack Soames, we stayed under Mount Kenya. He had an English garden, with all the prim, pale flowers accustomed to herbaceous borders hedged with yew. Over their heads flared dust-storms preluding the rains. Beyond them was the hot shrivelled plain and the dry bush. As a goddess—cool, detached, remote—the mountain communed with heaven. One evening ninety-two elephants appeared. A small one fell upside-down in a ditch. His mother was angry. She called to a bull. Together they bundled the calf on to his feet and administered a sound smacking with their trunks.

Before we left London, the Belgian Ambassador, who prided himself on having 'made the world safe for gorillas', had given us a letter

¹ 'Boy' Long was then married to Genesta Farquhar.

to his country's authorities in the Congo. So, with Dina and a young man known as 'Precious', we set off for Ruwanda. There we were welcomed by youthful officials and established in a Government rest-house, while neighbouring headmen were instructed to locate gorillas—in primeval forest. This was no easy matter, for the giant trees, thick with undergrowth and creepers, stretch for some thousand miles or so into—and across—the Congo. But news came one evening that the great beasts had been heard crashing through the forest.

As soon as it was light we started in pursuit. I found it an extraordinary experience, for we were unarmed. One Belgian official carried a light rifle. It looked suitable for peppering rooks, and I doubted if he had any ammunition. So stringent were the regulations against killing the rare gorilla that the hundreds of spearmen acting as beaters were warned not to use their weapons, except as a last desperate measure in self-defence. For hours we tramped or crawled through the forest. Naked natives with axes hewed a path. Appalling sounds came from thicknesses more—or less—distant. It sounded to me as if maddened elementals were preparing to charge. Bulls and lions would have seemed as mice beside the raging and the trampling which swelled out of a grove of trees as the gorillas were gradually surrounded. A space was cleared with machetes. The spearmen ranged themselves in a huge circle. They left open one path so that the beasts, having crossed the clearing, could escape into the forest. Meanwhile, out of the trees in front of which the four of us stood with the Belgian and his toy rifle, came a noise like hell on the Day of Judgment. I thought at least a hundred monsters would charge out of the thicket. Well in their way stood Arthur in a bright blue shirt.

"Couldn't you put on your coat?" I pleaded, feeling that gorillas might be allergic to blue.

"Why?" asked that maddening man—my husband. "It's very hot."

The Belgian warned us, "If a gorilla happens to charge you, do not move. Stand quite still. Then he may not kill you——" I was sure he wanted to add, "Above all, do not hurt him——"

Far too petrified to stir, I muttered, "Oh, quite, I would not think of moving." The spearmen whom I had plucked out of the bush and planted in groups around me had drifted away. Alone we stood, while noise beyond conception gathered force and spilled out of the thicket.

On the other side of it the boldest warriors advanced. The branches parted. Out came a delicious shaggy creature on all fours about the size of a Shetland pony. It looked kind and soft. Followed by two cubs, exactly like nursery toys, it blundered off into the forest cover. For one moment a great silver-streaked male, famous throughout the forest, stood upright and glared at us, beating his breast. Then he too dropped and shambled after his family. It was the biggest anti-climax I can remember. But the Belgian was delighted. As we ate sandwiches

in a ditch, he remarked, "A most successful day. Only one spearman ripped——" He must have noticed somebody's expression, for he continued hurriedly, "All my gorillas safe——"

"And your tourists," I concluded.

"Oh, yes, that is fortunate too. But if a gorilla has to be shot, there is so much trouble."

I glanced at his rifle. "I do not think the danger to your gorillas was excessive," I suggested.

On another quieter day in Congo forests we made acquaintance with the pigmies. They were shy and frail. They were also ugly—kin to monkeys in their quick, concerted movements and the way they took to the tallest trees for refuge. Dina, who always imposed civilization in the most contradictory circumstances, produced ice out of a thermos bottle, so that we could have cold drinks with lunch in the jungle. The bravest of the pigmies watched us. We gave him a fragment of ice. He dropped it as if it had been a live coal. But when he saw that we handled it with safety, he put it very carefully between two leaves and left it in the sun. Half an hour later, after he had sampled some of our food—with amazement and distaste—he looked for his treasure. It was gone. Witchcraft he thought—and fled, gibbering, into the tree depths.

That night, I remember, we spent in an inn consisting of a whole family of huts, large and small, gathered into a garden. Edwina Mountbatten had already arrived with her sister-in-law, Lady Milford Haven, 'Buns' Phillips, everlastingly tall, and a kind, gentle man whom we always forgot. He was invaluable at loading trucks or making dull arrangements. Except for our trousers, it might have been a party in London. We sat upon skin rugs and talked unceasingly. Dina looked as if she had just come out of tissue-paper. Nothing ruffled or disturbed her. Smooth, sunburned, golden—tireless and gay—she was the best travelling-companion I have ever had. Edwina always reminds me of a dark flower. Strenuous war-work with St. John Ambulance Brigade has translated her—spiritually—from the tropics to a temperate calm. But her beauty is always remarkable. So are her brains.

From the Congo, Arthur and I went to Entebbe, capital of Uganda, to stay with the Game Warden. Then I established myself in Kenya to write *These are Real People*, which is the tale of the twelve most remarkable men I have known. They include a priest, several murderers, intentional or the reverse, a drug-smuggler in the Red Sea, and a Polish convict escaping from Devil's Island.

Arthur flew home across Africa. Dina discarded 'Precious', who had been rather a nuisance in mid-river upon an inadequate raft, and acquired—after a while—her charming pilot. I re-met the Brooke-Pophams and enjoyed them both very much. He had just been appointed Governor of Kenya, so she had the task of dividing goats from sheep—particularly difficult in a colony where the former are

entitled to tuck their horns into coronets and take official part in coronations. The last time I had met the Air Marshal was in Iraq, when he persuaded me out of some nefarious adventure and into an official purpose. The next time was to be in Canada, where, in 1940, we were both involved with the war.

I also met a lioness in the back drive—in Nairobi, I mean, not in Canada. This seemed to me surprising, but nobody else minded.

When the book was finished and I thought there was no more rain left in heaven, I went—very damp—to Tanganyika. After sticking in a great deal of black mud, I arrived at Government House in Deir-es-Salaam. There I stayed with my friend and mentor of 1920 Khartoum, Sir Harold MacMichael. He is now Governor of Palestine. Together we drove—and even walked—about the country. For I had regained the energy daunted by the diverse and amazing, but always exaggerated, happenings among the small circle of my friends in Kenya.

I remember that not one more human being could be crushed into the already desperately extended hospitality of the Government House dinner-table on Coronation Day. So I went up-country with a railway coach and a cook to myself and spent the momentous hours, when the spirit of England was in Westminster Abbey, in a native village. I cannot remember the name, but there was a delightful Commissioner and a policeman who organized sports for tribesmen dressed—becomingly—in red clay. The chieftains added a few feathers, but the general impression was of magnificent scarlet bodies gleaming in the sun, of spears and drums and the unending dry, grey bush. The rains had evidently finished. It was very hot.

A loud-speaker recorded the service in the Abbey while we watched the naked tribesmen compete for children's toys. Music from the heart of London, the prayers of an Archbishop, the voices of King and Princes came grave and clear across ten thousand miles. They sounded very quiet in the torrid sun, among the turmoil of red, painted flesh. I thought of them as the steady heart-beats of an empire—relieved, grateful and at peace.

CHAPTER VI

1937

Pleasant Adventures in the Rhodesias and South Africa Lectures and An Obstinate Young Man

FROM TANGANYIKA I had intended to go overland to the Rhodesias, which I had known long ago in my 'teens, when my sole possessions were a horse, a clean shirt, a revolver which I could not use, a comb, a tooth-

brush, hope, and unlimited confidence. But nothing fitted. So one night Sir Harold's A.D.C., who proposed to join the church militant, placed me—with a mixture of reluctance and relief—upon a coasting boat. The first passenger I met was Alistair Gibb, bound for South Africa with a polo team. To avoid him, next morning I established myself upon the highest deck. To send a wireless Alistair climbed thereto. Coldly we greeted each other. Three hours later we were firm friends. We had, we allowed ourselves to remember, known each other since childhood. When I agreed that practically everything in Kenya was perfect, the sunburned fair young man looked at me with some pleasure. "I thought you'd change your mind," he said. I could not remember what opinions I was expected to change—but it seemed better not to ask.

Benignly we conversed through most of the journey to Portuguese East Africa. Amiably Alistair put me into a train—the right train—at Lorenzo Marques. In due course I arrived in Salisbury and stayed with a Director of the copper world spreading from Roan Antelope to Rhokana. It was autumn in South Africa. The air was mirror clear with the potency of wine. I thought I had never known the meaning of red till I saw thickets of poinsettias burning against the intense blue of Rhodesian skies. Salisbury to me is one of the most satisfactory achievements of empire, so well has it contrived to adjust the claims of brown man and white man, of England and of Africa. There, of course, my truant wanderings were remodelled into a familiar pattern. I was required to make speeches, to visit farms and to inspect institutions. All this I was glad to do in return for the pleasurable sensation of success which the Rhodesias have inherited from Cecil Rhodes. There was in that year, 1937, some talk of federation between the Colony and the Protectorate. I thought that both Rhodesias, with Nyasaland as well, would eventually be forced by military and economic pressure into some kind of union with South Africa. But I realized that the resultant prosperity would mean less to the heirs of Rhodes than their present conviction of being a British outpost with the same responsibilities as the men of Elizabethan Devon.

Even the first step to 'federation' would have its difficulties. For Southern Rhodesia protects her white workers by a minimum wage. There is nothing to prevent the native, if he has the requisite skill, from competing with the European, but he must be paid the same salary. In Northern Rhodesia, primarily dependent on mining, where costs of production have to be considered with regard to competition in the world market, natives are trained to replace the more expensive white labour in order to reduce working expenses in the copper belt. These divergent systems are the natural result of local conditions.

From Bulawayo I drove into the Matopos hills to stand once again—after nearly twenty years—by the grave of Rhodes. It is a great stone laid flat in the rock, and it is high up above the world. There among

his peers—the eagles—‘ the dreamer dreaming greatly ’ was accustomed to sit upon a boulder—in the sun and the wind—and gaze out over the land he gave to England. There—alone—he is buried.

Farther away among the wild hills is the monument to the Shangani patrol. It tells of the farmers who left their ploughs to ride against the Zulu armies under Lobengula. It was a forlorn hope. Across the Zambesi river the men were surrounded by a host of savages. They fought back to back, while their ammunition lasted—gaining time for the main force to be relieved. The immense stone, standing foursquare upon the roof of the young, strong colony, expresses the justification of empire. The epitome of pride is in the four words—wrought in the living rock under the figures of young men and old in their ordinary working clothes—‘ There were no survivors.’

At Victoria Falls the hospitable railway company entertained me for some days. In one of the most comfortable hotels I have ever met, I achieved the suitable mood for presentation to a marvel. By moonlight I wandered alone along the stupendous gorge. I heard the roar of the mighty waters and saw the pale lunar rainbow reflected on sheet mist. And now, in war-time, when I hear our bombers roar across the night on their mission of destruction, I think of the Zambesi river wearing away the rocks with the weight of unrelenting attack.

In daylight I walked in the forest, with the righteous wrath of the river driving down to the Falls, or—in a canoe which seemed to me like a leaf—I was paddled up to islands inhabited by monkeys. Night and day the force of the waters filled my ears with sound, my brain with images of relentless power.

Many people have asked me, “ Which is the finest Fall, Victoria or Niagara, or that miracle of waters, Iguasu, lost in Brazilian forest? ” There is no possible comparison. They are all different. Niagara is harnessed to civilization in the form of mechanized power. Of this, it is a symbol. Victoria is tremendous—and still savage—but the gorge is so narrow that the fall is lost in mist. Iguasu is superlative, for the whole of it can be seen. It is a moment of revelation in primeval forest—stretching unbroken across a continent.

In a Fox Moth I flew under the spectacular railway bridge and between the lips of the chasm with spray catching at the wings. I do not think I enjoyed it, but it was certainly a sensation. By way of reward the pilot, invisible above my head, flew me far across the forest to look for game upon the plains. Whenever he saw giraffes, lion or elephant, he banked down on a wing-tip. The plane was small and hot. There was no communication with the adventurous young man at the controls. I felt decidedly sick. Fortunately the game gave out before I did—but it was almost a dead heat.

Roan Antelope and Rhokana invited me to stay. So for miles and miles I drove over red earth, through dry, grey bush to see a world of copper. In the model townships round the mines I could have imagined

myself in U.S.A. For the organization of life for work and pleasure—libraries, hospitals, swimming-pools, clubs, sports grounds, cinemas, gardens and cafés—was on a successful American pattern. But always I was invited to speak about England.

At Lusaka I stayed at the new Residency with Sir Hubert and Lady Young. It was amusing to look out of a bedroom suggestive of *Vogue* on to unbridled bush. For in 1937 Lusaka, the new capital of Northern Rhodesia, was no more than a handful of splendidly red modern buildings set—as if on the first day of impressionist creation—in a wilderness which would have delighted sur-realism. I never could believe those great official structures were real. I imagined a godling, scrambling from Olympus to try the effect of his toys upon the earth's largest bush carpet.

At Lusaka I first met Sir Charles Dundas, subsequently Governor of the Bahamas. He was then Colonial Secretary.¹ He is a keen imperialist—and was not ashamed to be so when the sentiment was unfashionable with other Victorian principles. So he made me speak in a large, unfinished hall to a gathering, plucked at a moment's notice, from new offices or houses raw from plumber and carpenter. As introduction to my subject, which was always—in effect—'The Making of To-day', he spoke prophetically of Europe as a fabric which could only hold together if England supplied the needle and thread for darning. But even Sir Charles did not visualize the extent of the mending which the Allies will have to undertake.

From Lusaka I flew south in a two-seater plane lent me by H.E. The pilot had had a late night. He was very sleepy. So was I. But I woke at intervals—to see the sun in odder and odder places. At last I protested, "We are off our course—heading much too far west."

Somewhat harassed, the young man retorted, "There's more wind-drift than usual, and I must say I can't find the giraffe by which I generally navigate."

First with amusement and then with growing anxiety we stared down at the bush. It was uniform as the best pile carpet. There was no break and no landmark. I remembered how Lady Young had been lost in it flying her own plane. But the pilot was flippant. "We've enough petrol to reach the West Coast, and the bush must end before then——" he suggested.

With a gallon to spare, we landed at Livingstone and I took—somewhat thankfully—to the train. At Bulawayo I was removed from it, without warning, to make yet another speech. It was about ten in the morning. The platform was an office desk. Strong tea figured in the programme, but I do not remember if it was before or after my appeal—for a just appreciation of European happenings and the need of 'federation', closer still in the empire, widespread throughout the Americas, a healing potion in the Balkans and the Baltic. What I do

¹ In Northern Rhodesia.

remember is the keen, effective Rhodesian faces, most of them of British origin, but some Dutch or German, the charming gay frocks of the women and the generosity of their welcome.

There was not one moment in South Africa which I did not wholeheartedly enjoy. For everybody was kind, interesting—and interested. Even on the long train journeys men and women came to talk to me, saying they had read my books and agreed with me—or disagreed, for sound and sensible reasons. How much I liked South Africa! The culmination was a mad week in Johannesburg with the polo crowd. A delightful young couple, both preposterously good-looking, put me up in a big house on a hill. It was always full of other young people, equally gay and good to look upon. Nobody ever went to bed if they could think of anything else to do, however unlikely. Alistair Gibb was among the most determined night creatures. He was always anxious to try one more cabaret or café. Not till dawn flared in strangely dusky red above the waste heaps and the chimneys of the great mining city, would he be content to drive furiously back to our hill-top. Then there were more activities concerned with food and drink and what sofas could be used as extra beds—until it was not worth going properly to sleep.

At the beginning of such nights I was taken—always at a frenzied pace—to broadcast or to speak. I remember one august platform, upon which I nearly made a Gladstonian mistake. For a small black child, with red bows in her hair, was pushed on to the platform to present me with red lilies, tall as herself. Automatically I bent to kiss her. Just in time I caught the scandalized eyes of magnates in the front row. For in the Union there is a great gulf fixed between dark skins and white. Suspended midway across the chasm are the 'coloured people', fruit of an earlier latitude, social and moral. As I turned my gesture into a pat upon the crinkly head—descended from Shem, Ham or Japheth like the rest of us—the sigh of relief was audible.

The wife of a diamond king—a very lovely lady with a proud-held head and a fabulous necklace of great bluish stones—gave a party for me after my lecture. They made me sit in an enormous tapestried chair and fed me on the modern equivalent of 'nightingales' tongues, steeped in honey'. I felt like that rare and cherished beast, the unicorn. Sur-reptitiously I examined my head to see if it had swollen into a horn.

Naturally, I adored Johannesburg. For everybody made much of me—from the newspapers and the South African Broadcasting Company, the women's clubs and the mine managers, to the gay, gracious people, young and not so young, who lived with splendid detachment in great gardens among beautiful possessions on the hills above the city. Johannesburg will always be one of the bright lights on my life journey.

CHAPTER VII

1937

With General Smuts

TO PRETORIA I went to stay with the Bishop and Mrs. Parker. Under their roof, I remember long and interesting conversations about the Union, its politics and its difficulties. With them I met most of the South African Ministers and the first Oxford Group-ist I had encountered. He roused my interest in the movement, and on subsequent train journeys I read the books he provided. But I could never turn myself inside out in public, however salutary the effect. I find it difficult enough in private to make honest confession to myself. This, after twenty years, I can at times do—most successfully astride some peaceful quadruped in a vast geographical emptiness, or beside the striped silken seas of Eleuthera, where—with the unicorn of my childish dreams—I hope to live. But only cowardice or complacency would translate this inner consciousness of error into speech. Passion and sin are surely the two things most private to oneself—silence their justification or redemption.

With Mrs. Parker, I drove out to visit the then General Smuts. On the way we talked of South Africa and the dangers of Nazi propaganda. It seemed to me the very quality of the people—the sturdy independence, the religion and the family life of burghers and farmers—was fundamentally opposed to Hitlerism. Some Boers I had met admired German efficiency. But—fortunately for us, who conceive the Empire as capable of drastic modernization so that it may create and maintain a pacific international principle as a pattern perhaps for other federations of interest and purpose—the Boers I met generally differentiated between the constitutional German highly respected as farmer and pioneer, and the Nazi equally prepared with rifle and promises.

South Africa, I thought, was hampered by old-fashioned insistence on a dual language. For surely life is sufficiently complicated in our generation without adding the problem of ancient Babel? But it was only in the towns that the difference between Boer and Briton had much significance. On the veld, a man was a good farmer or a bad one without reference to his origin. As a matter of course he spoke 'Afrikaans' to his Kaffirs and to those of his neighbours who preferred a small vocabulary. With the townsman he shared a passion for politics. The majority of farmers would cheerfully drive their battered roadsters through a hundred miles of summer dust or winter mud to attend a political meeting, and they would talk about it for weeks afterwards.

The old-fashioned Boers living on the bush veldt and the back veldt

were then in favour of the strictest isolation. To them republicanism meant a chance of being left alone. They followed Dr. Malan, the leader of the Opposition, because he is an ardent Calvinist and a symbol of the old Voortrekker days, when each homestead was ruled by the Bible and a sjambok.

Of the brilliant and crude General Smuts, whom they called "Slim Johnnie", they used to say, "His is an English-made reputation." They were distrustful of his powers of speech and his adaptability, even of his knowledge, which, according to them, savoured too much of 'a man of the world'.

"What does he want with all those foreign books?" they asked, referring to the library which lines every wall in the General's wood-built farm. "Can't he get all he wants out of our own books and papers?"

To Pirow, the Minister of Defence, they were grateful because he was making South Africa into an air power, and by his insistence on public health he was improving the physique of the nation. But—while paying tribute to the efficiency bred in his German blood—the most reactionary considered him 'a foreigner'.

I heard the same obstinate and stalwart countrymen, who had rarely trekked more than twenty miles from their own homesteads, say of General Hertzog, "He has travelled too much. He knows too many Europeans." For them Dr. Malan was a Prophet who would lead them backwards to the Past.

The Boer has been accused of greed, but, in fact, he is not so deeply concerned with making money as with making his own life as he chooses in solitude and independence. He would rather have freedom than safety or prosperity. He abhors interference, as much from his next-door neighbour as from the Imperial Government.

In this gregarious age it interested me to notice that on contiguous farms, the settlers, if they were Dutch, invariably built their houses as far away as possible, in the least accessible corners of the property. In the oldest homesteads there might be neither mirror, bath, nor sanitary conveniences, but the food was always good and plentiful. Three generations of the same family might live under one roof, in which case beds overflowed on to the porches or into passages and storehouses.

The patriarchal system still existed, and the family, with all its ramifications, was united for the simple and serious business of making a living out of sweet veldt and sour veldt, high veldt and low.

The elders of such families still made a tri-yearly journey by wagon, with a great bed slung under a hood at the end of the vehicle and a span of sixteen oxen averaging two miles an hour, to the nearest dorp. There they camped within the church enclosure. They attended communion, celebrated the marriages and baptisms of their descendants, and incidentally cooked excellent sasati—lumps of mutton soaked in curry sauce—on skewers over their brushwood fires.

Such a farmer said to me, "I fought against you in 1900, I fought for you in 1914. I would fire my last shot for a Republic, but if England were in danger I would send the only son who remains to me to defend her." England to him—although I doubt if he could have expressed it—meant an ideal of friendly co-operation, as opposed to the militarist ambitions of Italy and Germany.

If the young people stayed on the land they were apt to be more Republican than their fathers, for they had no experience of life. They read their local newspaper in Afrikaans. They hardly ever spoke English. The recent Abyssinian war, 1935 to 1936, only interested them in so far as it concerned the African trade in cattle and the reaction of the local Kaffirs. But youth was making its way to the towns. With wireless and the motor-bicycle, space is eliminated. The new generation of Boers want the luxuries and the opportunities afforded by modern civilization.

They are well aware that these are not likely to be obtainable in a small and isolated republic, so the average Dutch townsman uses the cry of 'Separation' more or less automatically as a lever to obtain local privileges and perquisites, without visualizing the possibility of the policy he advocates being implemented.

Of such matters I talked with Mrs. Parker on that still, sunlit day driving across the veldt to see—perhaps—the wisest man alive.

The Bishop had speeded us on the way with, "Take care not to let the General get you out of the house or he'll walk you into the day after to-morrow."

The house in question was small, comfortable and stocky like a village cob. A dusty lane led to it from the highroad. Willows leaned before the prevailing wind. There were wide wooden porches and a variety of homely objects heaped in unexpected places. A hen sat on a rail and looked at us.

General Smuts was feeling cold. He had been reading a new book about the last war, so it had not occurred to him to eat or to move his chair out of a draught. I imagine he had just stretched out a groping hand, picked up anything it touched, and huddled it round his shoulders. He came out with what I thought was intended for a tablecloth wound about him, but it would never matter what Smuts wore. He is so definitely a person that in a railway waiting-room chaotic with traffic you would have to be aware of him. He has a quite extraordinary charm and a remarkable facility of expression. No wonder the dour and cautious farmers on the back veldt are frightened of being involved in something too big for them by the tidal force of Smuts' beliefs. There is nothing the man cannot do with words. He said to me at once: "You are a great surprise and a pleasure. I expected a different kind of woman. I've read a lot of your books and now I see that you write like you smile." The compliment was put more simply than Bernard Shaw's "I used to think you were a wonderful woman—

getting to all these places. But now I've seen you I realize it must have been quite easy for you."¹

General Smuts gave me the impression of being gay, neat—in spite of his open shirt and dusty flannel trousers, faded to the colour of the veldt—shrewd, and intuitive to the last degree, a law unto himself and, above all things, free. Most of us think we are free when we can shut our own front doors against the world, but for Smuts freedom means old clothes on the veldt and a tireless tramp with nobody in sight and his head full of ideas. He must surely have some Irish blood tucked away somewhere. For he has all the wit and the sympathy of Ireland with that devastating habit of being able to make exactly what he likes out of words. He has a prodigious memory. It is a filing-cabinet for everything he has ever heard or read. The walls of his farm-house are covered with books. From the floor to the ceiling, even in the passages they are ranged with the precision of an army in training, but it is an army which has seen battle. For Smuts knows all his books. They are his familiar friends. "Take any one you like," he told me. "Open it wherever you choose, read me a paragraph, and I'll tell you what comes next." It seemed an impossible feat, but the General accomplished it. In turn I read extracts from Ludwig, Dostoevski, Engelenburg's *General Botha*, Winston Churchill, Sacha Guitry, and the letters of Woodrow Wilson. With few exceptions, my host could quote the exact words which followed. He always knew the sense of the next paragraph. "It's dangerous," I commented, "to have such a good memory. If you can forget nothing at all, you take pain with you all your life." Smuts said, "I do not feel that sort of pain. You learn from the people who fail you, not from those who stick to you."

We had tea in a whitewashed room with two large tables taking up most of the place left by books and the possessions of grandchildren. Mrs. Smuts was a small, friendly figure in a dark blouse and skirt. She said she did not like wearing shoes in the house, and she moved with the ease and strength of carriage of those unaccustomed to high heels or whalebone. Her eyes followed her husband. She spoke of him as the 'old master'. She seemed to me staunch, quiet, kind, but with a strong will and a quick temper hidden away. I thought she must be just the right wife for the General, who is now Prime Minister and Field-Marshal. I could not imagine her flustered. Out of her pride she would be reassuring. She would also be practical and quite capable of pricking with cool, sound sense any exaggerated imaginativeness. She told the Bishop's wife how the 'oo' baas' had given her an evening coat to wear in Pretoria. It was velvet and very fine. He had chosen well, for he had good taste and he knew what women ought to wear, but for her own part she was not interested in clothes or parties. She liked living on the farm. She liked housekeeping and cooking and

¹ Said to me by 'G.B.S.' at a dinner given by Sir Henry Norman for the American Ambassador.

children. But best of all, I suppose, she liked looking after her husband. I could well imagine her, a sturdy, determined little figure in inconspicuous colours, following with quiet persistence through the drawing-rooms of official Pretoria—unmoved by compliments or criticism—the quick, elusive movements of her husband.

There was a certain amount of mystery about that tea-party on the General's farm. Mrs. Smuts whispered in the ear of the Bishop's wife. In the middle of excellent cakes, home-made, our hostess could resist temptation no longer. She wanted to show off her husband's latest gift. We followed her down a passage. She opened a door and revealed some excellent modern plumbing—the first in the house. "The plug pulls. Try it," she said. Then with a sigh: "But the 'oo' baas' does not like these new inventions. He prefers the veldt, and it is too cold, much too cold, for him in winter."

We went back to the dining-room, and Smuts talked with ease and knowledge of politics and political treaties. He is a clever judge of men, and found the right phrase for each of his colleagues in the last war. Lloyd George he described as "dynamite, but an uncertain charge", Arthur Balfour as "a competent idealist".

General Smuts seems elderly, even on occasions a trifle crumpled, with his sparse hair, deep-scarred lines and the sun- or wind-cripples at the corners of his lids—until you look straight into his eyes. Then you get a shock. For they are fiercely blue, indomitable and young. There—at last—is the right word for Smuts. I have been searching for it while I write. He is, above all things, indomitable. Like everybody endowed with charm—the Queen, the Duke of Windsor, President Roosevelt, Ellen Terry, Doumergue once President of France, the late Queens of Belgium and Roumania, Charlie Chaplin, Mr. Anthony Eden, Gracie Fields, and Italy's Ambassador in London, Count Grandi, who could do exactly what he liked with anybody from Cabinet Ministers to railway-porters—Smuts makes good and sensible use of a natural gift. Why should he not? Charm makes life much easier for most of its possessors, but there are some dwellers in isolated corners of the back veldt who are as suspicious of charm as they are of machinery and wireless, modern domestic conveniences, mass production and a free Press.

Wrinkled, hardy as the best leather, the Smuts of to-day is a combination of several other 'Jan Christiaans'—the Boer general of thirty, so desperate that with rifles and his friend, Deneys Reitz, he stalked in magnificent defiance a British warship anchored within range of some sand-dunes; the John the Baptist of Lloyd George, sent to prepare the way for peace among Irish Americans, Jews, Belgians and, incidentally, the imperialists of Versailles; one of the six members of the 1917 War Cabinet and a dissentient voice at Versailles.

"From the beginning," says the Smuts of to-day, "I knew that Versailles was wrong." He seems to have evaded the influence of President

Wilson. He was also much less tired and depressed than the other frontier-hagglers, scrapping economic necessity for ethnographical frontiers which were a combination of the illogical and the ideal. 'I have signed the Peace Treaty,' he wrote, 'not because I consider it a satisfactory document, but because it is imperatively necessary to close the war.' He added, '*The real work of making peace will only begin after this treaty has been signed.*'

All these diverse activities have gone to the making of South Africa's leader. He was once described—by Lord Fisher, I think—as "Napoleonic in audacity, Cromwellian in thoroughness, and Nelsonic in execution".

He has, to my mind, simpler qualities. He says: "Failure and success, being great and being very small indeed, have all fitted into the pattern of my life." With patience, perhaps with some amusement, he has listened for years to his parliamentary opponents making capital not only out of his alleged mistakes, but out of his unyielding personality. Then—with the same patience—he has got back to the veldt and travelled from dorp to dorp in an open roadster, on horseback, sometimes on a wagon, to explain to his own followers and to all the others who enjoy political speeches, what has been done in the last session. He also tells them about Europe and the folly of burning back the high grass and what he thinks of the harvest or the last Kaffir problem, if there happens to be one. Everybody asks questions—about the war and native labour and pea-nuts, about his botany-stick and his grass-press, about the Book of Isaiah and fruit-planting and the best yokes for travelling oxen, about Hitler and West Africa, and witch-doctors and snakeskin for teamsters' whips, about anything, in fact, which comes into their heads. They ask more of him than any other people or any other country have ever asked of their leaders. For he is more than a South African. Even when they doubt or disbelieve, even when they hate or fear, they know that Smuts fights, and has always fought, for what he believes is freedom. This is the very core and essence of the Union.

CHAPTER VIII

1937

Quarrels, Animals, Ideas and Friends

SOON AFTER MY VISIT to General Smuts, Alistair Gibb arrived at the Bishop's august portals in Pretoria—with a borrowed car. He said he thought we ought to see the famous National Park where President Kruger acted as Noah to the animals of South Africa. Everybody

A black and white cartoon illustration of a woman with a long neck and a wide-brimmed cowboy hat, riding a horse. She is wearing a vest with a large bow. A signpost next to the horse reads "BUREAU AIRTEL LONDON". The drawing is signed "M." in the bottom right corner.

"There may be more 'grit' in a little woman
than in a bare desert." Anonymous.



Right to left Captain Ghosh, A D C ; Guy Butler, Rosita Forbes, III the Rajah of Denkhinil and his brother. Our host had just shot his 730th tiger



With III the Maharaja Rana of Dholpur



On the terrace of the Palace at Patiala, the day before the Maharajah died. Left to right The Maharajah of Patna, the Rana Jung Bahadur of Nepal, son-in-law to Patiala, the Maharaja Kumar Bujundia, second son of Patiala, the Maharaja-Rana of Dholpur, Rosita Forbes

agreed—with enthusiasm. They may have been exhausted by my insistence on information; in any case they thrust me—with multiple blessings—into the long, red car beside Alistair. And off we went, to see lions, giraffes and most other beasts preserved by the ark.

It was a delicious and absurd expedition. For, in spite of our maps, we lost a good deal of the road and we always wanted to find it again—in diametrically opposite directions. We were equally obstinate. But I had the advantage of more fluent speech. So Alistair could but sulk when each leaning out of a different window, we addressed the same furious query to a gaping countryman and—of necessity—he answered mine, finding it more forcefully expressed.

“You ought to have married the Prince of Wales!” said Alistair furiously, when—at nightfall—we found ourselves, owing to my insistent misdirections, in so much the wrong place that there was nothing but veldt—and angry sounds out of sight. The finality of such a fate, rather than its improbability, reduced me to silence. So Alistair—meeting a Kaffir where we expected a lion—was able to elucidate our position. Very late indeed we found shelter in one of the delicious whitewashed inns wandering about as separate huts, each replete with bath. Food was produced—and pink gins. Thankfully I took to them. For I had never argued so much in my life.

Next day we met the largest giraffe I could imagine. It was like a dark tower, reducing the bush to insignificance. The sight restored us to amiability. In comparative peace we proceeded that day—between one animal and another, surrounded by unlimited bush—until after sunset, in a wilderness of sand, we lost the way again. So it went on. We enjoyed ourselves very much, for quarrelling can be as agreeable as any other sport if undertaken with the right person. On the third evening I insisted upon being deposited at an English farm, where an unknown woman had invited me to stay. She was an excellent writer, and her husband a farmer with imagination. He told me that when he found the village had been raiding his peaches, he bribed the local witch-doctor to ‘discover’, in melodramatic fashion, the principal culprits. Awed and dismayed, the young men were ordered to eat a mammoth portion of the remaining fruit, which was hard and green, after which they were given castor-oil and sent home lamenting. They did not steal again.

“As for the women who pilfer a sack of my pea-nuts, I make them weed my garden on a holiday. It’s not hard work, but every passing Kaffir laughs at them and calls ‘Hey, thief!’ so they generally ask for the pea-nuts next time, which is simpler all round.”

Last of my happy experiences in South Africa was a visit to a Boer family. Three generations shared a couple of charming white houses with enormous stoeps. The grandmother was the celebrated author of *From Dawn to Dusk*, the best tale I know of President Kruger and his gallant fight for freedom. In a dozen years two sons had turned twelve

thousand acres of barren bush veldt, supposed to be waterless, into a prosperous farm. I thought them all very interesting, for they were politicians and intellectuals as well as agriculturalists. They took me to Zeerust, which used to be a country 'dorp' dominated by the Dutch Reform Church. In 1937 there were only two European shops left. On a holiday the main street might have been in Bombay.

"All over the Union," explained my serious young host, "the Hindus, whose standard of living is so low that it is almost invisible, undercut the usual Dutch or English prices till they force the whites out of business. That is why we are not anxious to educate and develop the Kaffir until he also becomes a competitor. We have enough difficulty already with the Hindus and with the 'coloured people', who are generally as much a mixture in character as in race." Earnestly, he continued, "We have got to legislate for our own people first." And by his 'own people' he meant English, Boer and German, or the 'poor white' forced out of trade by the Hindu genius for commerce and gradually becoming incapable of work. "I don't say the Kaffirs are not human," he concluded as we drove back to the farm, "but they are a different proposition. You have got to acknowledge that." I imagine he was right—but not necessarily justified. For occasionally right is ruthless and wrong more suited to the happiness of everybody concerned. This is what—after twenty years of travel, mental as well as geographical—I find so puzzling.

With these Boer friends I made a journey by wagon. They arranged it for my benefit—as a picnic on a grand scale. I forget how many span of oxen we had, but they seemed to me to go on for ever. Half a dozen Kaffirs accompanied us. The driver used a 'seven league' whip. With it he could single out any beast among the sixteen or twenty padding along at under two miles an hour. The wagon had no springs or hood. Large sacks filled with straw made mattresses. On top of these, or among them, we perched, with cooking implements and food. The veldt was empty, except for tattered grey emus—or were they small ostriches? They flitted away, using their wings as fans.

All day we rumbled over sunburned earth, with kopjes like cottage loaves upon the horizon. The great wheels creaked and sang. In time the sound of them became hypnotic. It was an endless chant, in which we drowsed—lying full length upon the sacks, in a fog of dust.

Sometimes to be out of the dust, which rose steadily round the wagon and drifted gently from the hooves of the oxen, we walked ahead. It was very peaceful. A son of the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan—with whom I had serious talks in Pretoria—came with us. He was interesting because he was so interested in South Africa. And he had the gift of expression. We were both amateur photographers, so our conversations were both pictorial and political.

That night we camped beside a stream deep in reeds. Above it rose

enormous rocks, tabernacle of baboons. In the dusk we outspanned and arranged the stuffed sacks as one enormous mattress. On flat stones we cooked an excellent meal—sasatis and baked potatoes, with a great deal of coffee. In moonlight—and complete satiety—husbands and wives, children, young men and a girl or two arranged themselves upon the straw bedding, with coats and blankets spread over them. It was so cold—in mid-African winter—that a huge brushwood fire had to be lit and kept up all night. "It'll scare off the baboons, anyway," said one of the farmers.

At night I like to be alone. So purloining one sack and a blanket, I established myself under a tree. There, while admiring the arrogance of the kopjes, stark against a pewter sky, I wound my hair into flat curls and smothered my face in cream. I must have been a distasteful sight. Every hour or so I woke up feeling colder and colder. The first time I replaced my cording boots, which I had discarded. Subsequently I went for brisk walks among the rocks—to the amazement of the baboons. They barked at me and I remembered the fantastic tales of their loves and hates. Back to my sack and blanket I went. Before sunrise I woke again—with finality. So I had plenty of time to wash, brush and contrive a deceptively simple make-up with the right coloured powder and lipstick before the three generations on the mattress emerged fully dressed from their coverings. Then there was a wail of dismay. Among all the preparations—food, bedding, cooking-pots, cameras and books—soap had been forgotten. Only the Duncan boy had thought of a comb. Dishevelled young women looked at me with dismay. The most susceptible of the farmers stared. With awe, he said, "I did not know there were things which could make so much difference to a woman's appearance."

"Oh, yes—there *are*," I retorted with conviction. And—while offering to share 'the things'—I felt self-satisfied rather than ashamed. For I was at least ten years older than anyone—except the grandmother.

On the big Union Castle boat from Capetown to Southampton, I enjoyed myself more than usual. For I made friends with a young South African who had just taken a degree in philosophy. She had the clearest and most manageable brain I have ever encountered. Her features were equally well defined. I enjoyed looking at them while we walked up and down the lower deck for hours on end discussing ourselves and life. After a fortnight with Thelma Gutsche, I felt as if I had been dry-cleaned and admirably ironed. So new was my mental shape that I was not sure I had not been renovated by expert tailoring as well. My new friend, who, with Constance Holt—illogically but most successfully editor of *Woman's Own*—has affected my ideas more than anybody else I can remember, insisted on clarifying every instinctive expression. She had no use for symbols or pigeon-holes. Shibboleths were abhorrent to her. She used her wits as surgical implements. She had a lovely, neat head and freckles. Her hair was

shorn and smooth, her lips—flaring into the best vermillion—the only colour in her face. Every atom of her—physical or mental—was effective.

In German we talked because Thelma liked building up magnificent and shamelessly expressive words and I wanted to become more fluent in the natural language of philosophy.

There were some books of mine in the ship's library. Longing for the cool, decided young woman's appraisal I made her read one of them. She returned it with the remark, "It is an excellent description of what you saw and heard, but there is nothing more in it. You cannot really live so completely on the outside as you suggest. If you are impervious to sensation and emotion—how can you understand anything? You certainly cannot create. At best you can only record."

All that, I think, is true. I cannot write a good novel, or even a passable one. My only satisfactory venture in 'fiction' was under another name—and the tale was a faithful record of fact. So it does not count. It seems to me that the people who live life intensely—which means surely with due appreciation of its different facets—cannot invent stories. They are blinded by their own experience.

Perhaps if you see a great deal you cannot feel very much. It occurs to me that I could not satisfactorily combine a love affair with an important journey. One or other would certainly suffer. And I could not believe—on a communal cotton farm in Turkestan let us say, or among the gallant Jewish settlements in Argentine—that my own feelings were in the least important.

I enjoy tearing myself to pieces and looking at the result like most other women and few Anglo-Saxon men—but when it comes to 'factual intercourse' I would rather listen than talk. I really am a very good listener. So I was told—at a terrible dinner-party, its only relief the stories of Prince Arthur of Connaught—by the most unpopular man in London.

I want to know things more than to feel them—because feeling hurts so much. And I am tired of being hurt. I do not believe an excess of spiritual pain does one any good at all. It batters one into a state where one is apt to lose common sense and proportion. Then one has to rely on other people for re-stiffening.

Sometimes I am tempted—by blood, training, rebellion and diverse enthusiasms—into over-emphasis, which is generally regarded as insincerity. But this is not so. I say what I think at the moment—probably too much of what I think. Among Latins or Slavs this is not at all unusual, but in England it is—on occasions—a disaster.

Thelma regarded me, I think, as an experiment. The raw material of my mind attracted her. She tried to make something scientifically desirable out of my plentiful but chaotic ideas. While we strode—to the amazement of our fellow passengers—up and down the deck, irritating potential sleepers by the diversity and magnitude of our

language, I thought that my companion was adept at looking all round a subject before concentrating on one facet. This I find difficult—for I always wonder if another may not be more important. So I must content myself with recording. I cannot create. Politics are denied to me, for I should be equally interested in both sides. When with extreme socialists, I generally feel conservative, because I approve of private enterprise. I admire individuality. I want to preserve manners, dignity, space and beauty with the leisure and privacy necessary for the achievement of some masterpieces. When with excessive Tories, I become a convinced and expressive socialist, for I want opportunity to be equal and widespread. I do not believe in privileges unless they are earned. I am interested in personality rather than in pedigree relationships—although I admit and admire the qualities often, but not always, engendered by inherited tradition. In effect I am not a politician and I do not understand expediencies. So I shall always be something of an outlaw—as well as an onlooker. I shall have lots of friends because I do most sincerely like people—and peoples. I am interested in their intentions. I see their difficulties. I shall also have enemies, for I cannot fit into any one pigeon-hole. I always want to break through into the next. Worse still, I cannot believe with Lord Chesterfield that ‘truth is too large for one man’s pocket’. On the contrary, I would like to enlarge every pocket to hold truth. So I make certain of criticism—but also of much interest and entertainment. Both these Thelma Gutsche gave me in full measure. She is one of the most satisfactory friends I have gathered open-armed all over the earth—with an occasional enemy, prickly as a thistle. Yes—I certainly do like people. They have been so good to me.

CHAPTER IX

1937

Germany, Hungary and Yugoslavia Choose Different Prophets

WHEN I RETURNED TO ENGLAND in early August the Maharanee of Jaipur was still established in our house. So there was a good excuse for going away again. We had just bought a new car with the help of Billy Rootes, whose ‘Snipes’ had yearly borne us over Europe in their stride—or should it be their flight? It would be fun, we thought, to drive to Yugoslavia and Southern Italy, taking the Alps—as if they were pills—on the way. First we went to Berlin and stayed with Alan Graves. He had a large motor-boat on the Wannsee. So from one picnic to another, between trees and water, we occupied our days. We

swam and lay in the sun and talked of Germany. Dorothe Pückler, Gloria Furstenburg, Veronica von Glaubig and Ursula Hohenlohe were the loveliest of the sunburned young goddesses, superlatively shaped, who lived as much as possible upon the lake. Deliberately, I think, these young Germans, with their seriously athletic brothers and husbands, put out of their minds what might happen. They hoped against hope it would *not*. Many of them hated and feared the Nazi regime, but they were fair about what it had done for the country. I could not induce any of these splendidly healthy young people, golden as apricots, to be what I considered 'sufficiently appalled' by the fate of the Jews in Germany. It is really most extraordinary how commonplace, quite kindly individuals can be indifferent to the sufferings of their neighbours.

The Germans I met in 1937 knew about the concentration camps, but thought the tales exaggerated. They looked forward to a greater tolerance as National Socialism achieved its objectives. They refused to believe these included world domination. With amusement they talked of the maps circulated to schools and factories. These included in the Reich most of Central Europe—ringed by satellite states within the 'new order'.

At Schloss Buckow, with Countess von Dohna, we met older people who were troubled, but by no means desperate. They liked being surrounded by ordered prosperity. They disliked the espionage which seeped into their houses. They disapproved of the growing arrogance and intolerance of their own sons, but hoped it would pass. They were afraid of war, but—like so many of us—they could not believe such immeasurable disaster would happen. Elie von Dohna and her friends—the Plaucens, the Bülowes—were insistent that England should re-arm. "You must be very strong indeed if you are to stop the Führer," they repeated. Some added, "It is natural that he should think of himself as succeeding where Bismarck failed. Look what he has given to Germany—order, security, employment! He cannot be blamed if he thinks he can do the same for the rest of the world."

The landowners, their acres shorn for small-holdings, their production organized for the benefit of the State, were fearful of Hitler's socialism. They saw little difference between the Reich and Russia, of which country—or system—they were always afraid. Under the great lime trees on the terrace, with green, flowerless gardens stretching to the lake, we discussed interminably the future of National Socialism. Countess Plauen, a young, fair Swede, international-minded, said, "Its only hope is war. Otherwise it must break—like any other exaggerated form of state control. The Führer has in effect abolished money. Coinage in Germany is now only a convenient token for barter. He has eliminated unemployment by putting young men into the army and older ones into industry which supplies the army. That is all very well until the army has all the material it requires and nothing to do

with it. Then Hitler will have to provide an enemy, or the system will crack—because it will have no further purpose.”

“Do you think the Führer is sincere?” I asked.

“Oh, yes—according to his limitations.”

“What do you mean?”

The young Scandinavian wrinkled an admirable forehead. “His enthusiasms change,” she explained, “but while they last, he certainly believes in them.” I was surprised.

The following week we drove some ninety miles to the Plauens’ castle, where divisional manoeuvres were taking place. The officers came in for hurried meals. It was very much as it might have been on Salisbury Plain. For this was the rank and file of the German Army, not the black-shirted Nazi militia. And in 1937 the Army as a whole did not want to fight a serious war. A young Captain expressed the general idea, “We should not mind a small quick war in our own neighbourhood. It would be good exercise. But we certainly do not want to be involved for years against France.”

England did not count, they thought. It was the French Army—‘the finest in the world’—with which they were preoccupied!

It took Dr. Goebbels just one year—from September 1938 to September 1939—to change the whole point of view of the Army and to bring it into line with the Nazi party.

An elderly Princess of Reuss was staying with the Plauens. Her family had suffered a good deal from predatory Nazis. So I asked her what she thought of the Führer. She replied, “As a man he is not at all important, but he has become the symbol of something very big.” Grey-haired, unfashionable, dignified, the Princess gathered her thoughts. “Hitler began by being very useful. He appealed to the sentimentality of Germany and he gave the majority what they wanted—to men, work; to women, homes and husbands; to all of them food, stability and self-respect. But he is really quite a little man and he knows nothing about other countries. So he is bound to make mistakes. Unfortunately the need of Germany for a saviour has put him into a position where his mistakes are likely to be of disastrous proportions.”

“He is such a bad picker of men——” I suggested.

“That is always the case with the wrong kind of prophet,” said the Princess. We agreed that Nazism had put into power the worst elements German arrogance could produce. But the elderly, impoverished aristocrat attributed all that was so evidently wrong in the Führer’s policy to extreme socialism. For her, there was little difference between one revolution and another. “In Germany,” she said, “class has been abolished with individual responsibility. Now there is as much trouble about Aryan origin as there was about quarterings at the Kaiser’s court. It seems there must always be some distinction——” She spoke wearily. The Germany she knew had come to an end.

I did not necessarily agree with what I heard that year or any year in Germany and in Italy—indeed in any European country. Often I disagreed profoundly—and said so. But my own ideas were unimportant, because inevitably they were biased. For I thought first of England. Yet I found German theories or convictions interesting. They were also extremely important as showing how the nation felt and therefore how it was likely to behave.

The young workers with whom I talked were still enthusiastic. They were certain of their jobs and of their social position. They had adequate wages—although consumers' goods were lacking and synthetic products becoming more and more familiar. A fortnight's holiday on full pay was assured to them each year. They could travel at government expense to sea-side camps or enjoy workers' cruises on the best liners. An admiring world, they felt, would soon have to sit up and take notice of them!

Public health was certainly remarkable. It happened that at some house where we stayed, a gardener's wife had a baby. Within a few hours an official inspector arrived to see that mother and child were receiving the proper care. Special food followed—with further visits to ensure the carrying out of instructions.

On the other hand, incurables were already mysteriously missing. The mentally deficient just disappeared. There was, I thought, an unpleasant lack of humanity in the young party members—even towards their own people.

At the Brown House in Munich, the Director of European Information invited me—by way of an afternoon's entertainment—to see a woman beheaded. He said, "We find a return to the old German punishments is good."

"Good for whom?" I asked, sickened.

Throughout the Reich, children were playing at being soldiers, and they did it seriously—with painful consequences to 'captives'. Their older brothers and sisters were frankly relieved because they no longer had to think. They were assured of sustenance, labour and purpose. For the rest, they could let themselves go in an orgy of muddled sentimentality—concerned with the Führer and a new world order.

Across Czechoslovakia we drove and paused in Prague, so that I have a clear recollection of that lovely city intent—not dreaming like Buda—above the river. On we went into Hungary, and after gaieties in the capital, we stayed with Denise Wenkheim at Okijos. In this great, grey house, set sadly, I thought, among dark green trees and green lawns without flowers, the footmen and the grooms each had a bicycle polo team. On wet days they played in one of the big halls. The English and German governesses, the estate steward and the family Confessor shared our meals. They were formal and excellent. But the once-splendid house was shabby. The Wenkheim heritage had not lost an acre, but Hungary's shrunken frontiers had limited the market

for its agricultural produce. There was no luxury except in the matter of horses. Morning and evening—on different thoroughbreds—I rode with the delicate, dark Denise or her children across the sun-washed plains. They were pale and very still. The sheep were hidden in their folds. The peasants were colourless in their hand-woven woollens. Only the grass stirred among the last bleached flowers of summer. The Wenkheims always marry among their own kin to keep the estates intact. Denise, whom I had met in Kenya—wearing an elephant-hair bracelet round the slenderest ankle in Europe—had secured a special dispensation from Rome to marry her mother's brother, also a Wenkheim. Feudalism could go no further, I thought.

One evening, I remember, we walked through the straying gardens, so flowerless, to a keeper's cottage. Triplets had recently been born. The mother was delighted. "The Countess will bring them up," she explained, "and as they are all boys they will do well as footmen. How fine they will look, all matching!"

The villages of Hungary were pages back in the history of social evolution. My mother—benevolent despot of a similar phase of life in the Lincolnshire of thirty years ago—would have loved Okijos.

When we returned to Budapest, the Regent invited us to watch the water-polo finals. It happened that the competing teams were Hungarian and German. The latter rose waist-high out of the pool to give the Nazi salute—"Sieg Heil". Subsequently they cheated on every possible occasion. Whenever they could get their opponents under water—invisible—they mauled them in indescribable fashion. I was sitting beside the Regent. One of the first things he said to me was, "How I hate the Germans!" And he refused to applaud any German goal. Fortunately the Hungarians won. They were much quicker witted than their opponents, who depended above water on strength, below it on brutality.

Slender and sunburned, the Magyar team hailed Admiral Horthy and their own victory with the battle-cry of their ancestors. "Hoya, Hoya!" they cried—like the Christian horsemen stemming Tartar savagery upon the frontiers of the West.

Unsmiling, the Nazis replied. Their grim "Hail to the Victor!" was an augury of disaster.

With Hungary—divided between dislike of National Socialism and interest in any 'New Order' which would ensure revision of the Peace Treaties¹—we left the highroads of civilization. It cost us a number of punctures in tyres and temper to reach the Adriatic. We slept in vague inns and destroyed the symmetry of our new car bumping from pot-hole to hummock through the heaped—and I decided quite unnecessary—mountains north of Ragusa.

Very late at night we arrived at Savtat, a delicious village mirrored in a cove. The wind always stayed outside. The whole point and

¹ See *Gypsy in the Sun*.

intention of Savtat so far as it concerns England is—or was—the Banatz villa. The family were altogether—but very differently—enchanting. We found them so, even when we arrived hungry, dirty, battered and cross towards the middle of the night. As usual, the house was overflowing. Arthur and I were given a sugar-pink room, ecstatically frilled—in which we looked dustier than we had imagined possible. Red-headed Mary Cunningham-Reid was next door. Fantastically good-looking young men, including a stepson, Ivan Ivanovitch, were all over the place. The Kents were expected within a day or two. A deer-like, dark young Caucasian, Princess Bagraxian, played interminable backgammon with a Frenchwoman, so emphatic in her chic that I do not remember her face at all. A lovely sailing-yacht was in harbour. From it casually elegant English came for meals upon the terrace. Madame Banatz, in flowing white or purple, looked always like Ceres. More and more people arrived—to stay, or to eat. She remained serene. There was a warm beneficence about her house—some of it due perhaps to lobsters and saffron rice, figs and golden grapes and yards and yards of lovely crisp brown rolls with butter in cool yellow hillocks. How good it all was! The Stancioffs and the Banatz are my two favourite families in all Europe. Fortunately they are sufficiently international, having married over two continents, to be regarded as outside the conventional category of ‘enemy’ or ‘ally’.

Most of our days at Savtat were spent in the sea. It was carpeted with sea-urchins. So the evening always began with a visit from the village doctor, adept at extracting the spines. Doushka Banatz, the apricot-coloured daughter, had a particularly soothing manner. So she—poor girl—had to spend her time holding limbs which looked like pin cushions while the stalwart doctor, paid by the season and therefore indifferent to the effect he made, probed and dug. It was painful, but with Doushka murmuring velvet absurdities—bearable.

With the dark Ivan, a much better swimmer than any porpoise, I used to discuss the politics and the intentions of Yugoslavia. It amused the young man to say, “I am a simple Serb. That means half-savage, you must realize. I cannot cope with Croatian complications.”

“Don’t you ever think of yourself as a Yugoslav?” I asked.

“No. Why should I?” Ivan would reply—deliberately ingenuous. “The Serbs are good enough for me—and when there’s another war you’ll think us good enough too.”

“Why should there be another war?” I asked.

“There always is in Serbia. We are used to it. Fighting is the thing we do best—so why stop doing it?” Flippantly he continued, “It is a form of national self-expression. We always lose everything. But that does not stop us fighting.”

I quoted King Alexander on the subject of his cousin, Prince Paul—who ‘wanted to die in his bed’.

“Oh, we don’t bother about him, except as a politician,” said Ivan.

"We wouldn't be out of any war, whoever ruled us. You'll see——"

He was right. For when the German offer of 'security' tempted the Regent to a nightmare conception of 'neutrality', stalwart and stubborn Serbs followed General Tito into the mountains. There—as Ivan predicted—they have gone on fighting year after year, imperturbable, undefeated.

CHAPTER X

1937

Italy Loses Her Manners and France Her Senses

IN THE MIDDLE OF ANOTHER NIGHT the Banatz family, having given us an exquisite dinner in the celebrated restaurant tucked into a corner of Ragusa's battlements, put us on board a steamer bound for Italy. Next morning we disembarked at Bari among the usual arguments, orders and posters. The chief thing I remember about that last visit to Fascist Italy was the stridency of walls, rocks and hoardings as well as of voices. From town to village and across the mountains to Naples, south again to divine Amalfi and Sorrento, every flat or mildly sloping space shrieked of the Duce's achievements.

At Ravello, high upon a singularly unget-at-able hill-top, we stayed with the Grimthorpes in their mixture of castle and villa. It was pleasantly remote from the politics and the prolific procreation of the coast. I cannot remember a single significant conversation. There upon our hill we enjoyed the sun and the panoply of mountains reared above the sea. Lucy Beckett, Lord Grimthorpe's sister, had married an Austrian, Count Czernin. She lived within hand's reach of the villa, in a cottage clinging like a swallow's nest to the cliff. I was giddy whenever I looked from her windows. It would need an army of goats, I thought then, to storm the ranges, complicated as herring bones, which make the spine of Italy.

Whenever I induced reluctant Grimthorpes or their guests to leave the splendid isolation of their hill, we slipped into the chaos of children and posters, equally blatant, which represented the main production of 'Napolitania'. For Calabria was more inclined to think of itself in terms of the old kingdom, Bourbon or Napoleonic, than as 'Italian'. The Duce was definitely popular. He had effectively subsidized child-bearing—which the women apparently enjoyed. He had assisted farmers and fishermen. He had asked nothing in return except larger families. These, townsfolk and peasants were delighted to provide. "For now we have colonies in Africa," they said. "If our children

cannot find work here, there is plenty of room for them—and all so well arranged—across ‘the sea’.”

Mildly, the thin, dark-eyed, sunburned Balila marched in the heat and the dust. Soulfully they sang ‘Giovinezza’. But it was—for the most part—a game. On the dreamy, deserted piazza in Ravello, smouldering in the afternoon sun, the chemist enjoying the heat as I did, explained. “See you, we Neapolitans are not fighters. We are too civilized. We can do so much else better than fight.” Idly, he regarded the landscape, beautiful and excessive. “We are good artists, cooks and—*per capita*—husbands. We can make music and love. We can make books or arguments, for we enjoy words, but really we are too well occupied for war. It is a fact, Signora, which surely the Duce knows.” This seemed to me typical of Southern Italy—but not of the North.

We drove on to stay with my brother, who was then First Secretary at our Legation to the Vatican. All the way, roofs, walls, palings and hill-sides screamed at us more and more ridiculous repetition of Fascist aims and achievements. The final emphasis was on empire. It was humiliating to credit the human race with such ignominious lack of sense as was revealed by Fascist boasting over Abyssinia. It might have been a Caesarian triumph.

As we left the soft and lazy South, the Balila marched with grimmer intentions. Manners deteriorated. There were more and more uniforms bulging with self-importance. And—most significant—the name of the Duce became less important than that of the House of Savoy.

At that time—September 1937—my brother Tony had Lord Berners’s house looking directly into the Forum. It was said to be haunted. Certainly it had an atmosphere. Tony said he had taken it because he thought our mother would look so nice walking down the long saloon with its curtains of faded yellow brocade. It was a strange house, uncomfortably aware of itself, but I liked it. The Italian butler, Giulio, said the dining-room was particularly perverse. “Things happened there”—but he would not say more. In his own fashion, he was a genius. He could do anything, and his favourite sentence was ‘*Ci penso io*’. Whatever we needed—however complicated and unlikely—Giulio assured us ‘*Ci penso io*’—I will arrange it. He always did so—without fuss. Even when Tony lost himself, forgetting an invited dinner-party, Giulio retrieved him. He arranged to salve the guests Tony left waiting to be picked up in unlikely places. I suggested to Arthur that he would certainly entertain any young woman whom my brother mislaid—a book or an idea proving more interesting. It was Giulio who first spoke to us of the Duce as ‘Il Vecchio’, the old one. “*Ben sicuro*, certainly he has done much good for Italy,” said Giulio with admirable sense of proportion, “but now we have sufficient order, there is no need for so much discipline or so many proclamations.

Italy is well arranged. She has work. She is safe. There is also pleasure. Has the Signora seen the new swimming-pool in the Mussolini Forum? It is magnificent. But now really it is enough. The 'old one' can retire." Other middle-aged workers said much the same thing. They were proud of the security and dignity which they felt Mussolini had given them. The splendour of his new Rome—besides providing employment—added to their pride. But the last thing they wanted was war.

The Irish Minister to the Vatican, married to an American, was a great friend of Tony's. He talked interestingly of many subjects, but especially about the House of Savoy. He said, "One of the few people who has never underestimated its influence is the Duce. He knew he could not get rid of it or do without it. If he ever gets himself into an untenable position, you will see he'll hand the whole thing over to the King."

I was amazed. "What would happen in the country?" I asked.

"As you go north," said the Irishman, "you'll find the country thinks a great deal of the House of Savoy. The Duce is all right in peace and as long as things go well. He could not hold Italy against disaster."

"What sort of disaster do you mean?"

"War, of course."

We drove north and found he was right. The slogans still shrieked from hoarding and house-front, but they were far more concerned with the 'King-Emperor' or the Prince of Piedmont than with Mussolini. In Florence we found hard-headed Northerners expressing the utmost dislike of Germany. But they were also much more interested in Italy as a nation—and a success—than the indolent Neapolitans. The Alpini and the Bersagliere were fine fighting regiments. Some of them were stationed in Florence. They did not look like inflated bull-frogs. They had not lost the good manners of their race. Some of the officers talked of Garibaldi's curse—on anyone who bore arms against England. They wanted Tunisia. This was the result of Fascist propaganda. They admired German efficiency and disliked the individual Teuton. They were proud of the new Italy and ready to fight for her—but they would have preferred to do so *against Germany*. Ciano was already unpopular and the Duce chiefly appreciated for his extension of Italian sovereignty. With ingenuous pleasure, our Florentine acquaintances congratulated themselves on their new empire, but they had no desire to colonize. Abyssinia was satisfactorily far away. They could not be expected to go there.

In Florence I took Arthur to see my favourite Madonnas. For, long years ago, I had finished my schooling in Italy and I remembered—with delight—the Fra Angelico angels, stiff and garish as an autumn garden, and the peasant virgins of Botticelli with hair of incomparable gold, lips honey-sweet and heavy. Arthur retorted by taking me to a

jeweller on the Ponte Vecchio. After that life was simple and entirely satisfactory. For I had only to suggest another Perugino to acquire another jewel. It was expensive for my husband, but he preferred my delight in Florentine craftsmanship—always suggestive of a garden—to his own gloom before a Crucifixion or a Last Supper. So I acquired a bracelet and clips, a ring and the loveliest cigarette-case gay as a peacock's tail, made of surprising jewels—sapphires, aquamarines, rubies and emeralds all put together, lavish and delicate as paradise plumes. Then, in self-defence, Arthur insisted on departure. It was a pity. There was a yellow diamond feather which I coveted—and lots more pictures of martyrdoms. I had thought of several, particularly grim, in chill, stuffy churches which would certainly depress my husband to the point of—more jewellery!

On the way to Paris we ate a great number of excellent meals and drank superb Montrachet. In a mist of well-being induced by 'poulet farcie', 'truites bleus' which melted on the tongue and such omelettes as justify all France's claims to 'civilization', we motored north—arriving eventually at 'the Tour du Saint Loup'. Violet Trefusis immediately provided us with mental stimulus in several forms. I remember an editor of *Le Temps*, an author, a left-wing politician and a conservative landowner, each out-talking the others. It is amazing how quickly, logically—and impractically—the French brain works. No wonder Downing Street had for twenty years a sense of inferiority beside the pre-war Quai d'Orsay. Paris had an answer for everything. It was generally the wrong one—but it sounded well.

At the 'Tower of the Sainted Wolf', I thought of Germany while I listened to verbal fencing. Swift as rapier blades, ideas flashed into expression. Conversation was apposite and entertaining. Wit polished the blades of speech. The richness of the French language painted them. But the effect was to a certain extent meretricious. For, in late 1937, there was no ready-made answer to German aggression or to the chaos wherein France had lost all sense of proportion. Two years later her 'civilization' came to an end—because she could not, or would not, fight for it.

Four years it has taken us—the unimaginative British—to forge, with the help of America and Russia, the only answer which will convince Germany.

As soon as we left Violet's eclectic party, which she directed with the amused and guileful assurance of a woman much admired, we found ourselves among people who were desperately afraid. They all had different fears, according to their politics. These were astoundingly varied. The factory workers, backbone of the Popular Front, were afraid of persecution. The 'Young Patriots' of Monsieur Tailbout, M. Renaud's 'French Solidarity', the 'French Social Front' backed by armament millionaires, M. Doriot's 'Popular' party were all terrified of not being sufficiently important to get their own way. Each

virulent group was rendered inept by the wildest internal dissension, so that followers as well as leaders were always accusing each other of outrageous intentions. Each party had within its own ranks men whom it feared under the label of 'communist' or 'fascist'. So everyone voiced some version of the *fear* which was then the keynote of France. Among workers it was the fear of losing their hard-won and still comparative prosperity. Among industrialists it was fear of losing the whole capitalist system.

The farmers and small tradesmen—middle-class backbone of France—were disgusted with every Government. They were determined to keep the land or the business, representing at once their Bible and their banking account. The intellectuals, accustomed to spiritual honesty, were willing to try anything, even, as was proved in the summer of 1940—co-operating with Germany, if they could be clear of graft, chicanery and muddled thinking.

The Communists wanted a Leninist existence which has long gone out of fashion in Russia. A representative of the C.G.T.¹ spoke of the Soviet as 'Creation' in capital letters. I agreed, but said that it was not Communism which was being created in the U.S.S.R., for between Murmansk and Tashkent extreme socialism is a thing of the past. "Wages range from a hundred and fifty to four thousand five hundred roubles a month," I explained. "Fortunes can be made and left to another generation. The Government is building flats for 'technicians' where there are servants' rooms. Soon there will be plenty of private enterprise with resultant differences of prosperity. Inevitably class distinctions are coming back, but I must say they are confined to the individual and not dependent upon his family history."

Thirty miles from Paris I watched a party of young Communists, Hollywood-esque in the amount of red they contrived to display about their persons, attempt to stop the harvesting of a late crop.

They were out for a 'Peasants' Strike' to prove the solidarity of French workers. A stalwart village woman approached them across the fields.

"Stop that machine!" they told her.

"My husband and my two sons are working it," she said. "Go and tell them to stop if you like, but I shall be sorry for you."

Unemotional, she stood and looked at them.

The reaping continued. Not one of the strikers dared interfere with the three sturdy peasants intent on garnering their living.

On our way through Paris we lunched at the British Embassy with Sir George Clerk. The Czech Minister was present. Somebody asked him how long his countrymen could hold their celebrated line of fortifications against Germany. His reply was non-committal. In my car a neutral diplomatist murmured, "Five days—with luck."

¹ Confédération Générale du Travail, headed by M. Jouhaux, who then supported Léon Blum.

A brilliant *littérateur* remarked that France's greatest danger was *une fuite en avant*—flight turning from sheer terror into attack. Everyone supposed France must crack within the next year or two—possibly even that autumn, for she could no longer support the careless or intentional rough handling of her politicians. A war might save her—if she had anything with which to fight. That France was in the sadder position of having nothing *for* which it seemed to her worth fighting, they had not yet realized.

In the fireworks of the elaborate World Exhibition—last of its kind for my generation, I imagine—we found relief from so much Fear. Paris has a genius for gaiety. She contrived to produce its effect in the thronged restaurants and cafés, among the rare exhibits, in coloured lights and fountains, in the taste of women and the luxury men heaped about them, throughout the great 'Exposition'. There much of the world met—and parted—with finality.

CHAPTER XI

1938

I am Persuaded into Disaster. Rescue from Travancore to Denkanhal

THAT SAME SUMMER, while we were staying at Baynards—with Sir Dennis Burney who invented the paravane and designed the successful airship *R100*—two Indians appeared upon the terrace familiar to ill-fated Thomas Cranmer. Gladys Burney, an American, very pretty, very capable, gave them tea. Brenda de Chimay and her tall 'Sim'—who now writes with amused perspicacity from the whirlpool of politics in French North Africa—alarmed them with her justifiable insistence on British quality. The Indians were charming, persuasive and specious. They wanted me to act in a prominent but not exactly specified relationship to a big game shooting tour of India. It was to take place the following winter.

I had just returned—with Thelma Gutsche—from South Africa. Within a few days Arthur and I were starting for Berlin. So I said, "No." But everybody else, including the two Hindus—from Calcutta—said it would be great fun. Foolishly I was persuaded to alter my decision. I had never seen the Indian jungle. I had never been to the Southern States. Friends of my own age were established in the Government Houses of Madras and Bengal. It would be pleasant to stay with them. An enterprising publisher suggested a book *India of*

the Princes. On the spur of the moment—my last moment in England that summer—I said, “Yes.”

The tour started late that winter;¹ I do not remember the month. It was a disaster. Its only moments of success were on board the big Italian liner from Genoa to Calcutta. It had a swimming-pool and an excellent orchestra. Evan Tredegar was on board with ‘Porchie’ Carnarvon, ‘Cardie’ Montague, and Diana Gibb—Alistair’s wife, also one of the Shaftesbury girls known as ‘Duchess’, Lady Alexandra Haig, and Barbara Hutton with her Danish husband Count Haugwitz Reventlow. Evan had a crystal which, swinging on a scarlet cord, was supposed to answer questions. One by one—or indiscreetly in special pairs—we consulted it with regard to likely and unlikely futures. It was reasonable. It told me that I could get what I wanted if I took enough trouble, but that I would not.

All together—with the then Sir Herbert Cayzer, a young man called Guy Butler and a delightful fair-haired girl belonging to the big game party—we had great fun. Arrival in Ceylon put an end to this. For the whole tour was a gamble on the part of the Indian Company. How they hoped to make good their fabulous promises, I cannot imagine. Even a moderate success they had made impossible by dividing direction of the party between a charming middle-aged British colonel and me—without warning either of the other’s position. How we exasperated and bewildered each other before we discovered the trick played on us!

It was an extraordinary, and for me, no doubt, a salutary experience. For during the weeks when—greatly tried, quarrelling vigorously, although under the circumstances not without reason—the party held together, it was always being marooned without transport, generally with the bearers unpaid or the cooks demanding money for food, in mid-forest. Once it reposed upon a siding, while only the most forceful argument on my part prevented a justly outraged railway company removing—with their special coaches—our only hope of beds. It seems funny now, in retrospect, but it was awful at the time. It was hot. It was uncomfortable. There was never enough of anything—including tigers. These indeed were particularly elusive, and they were always being shot by the wrong people. For it must be confessed that the guns were excessively jealous. I had not previously come across this particular complication and had not realized the passion for skin or head which can ravage and transform an ordinary Englishman. So the unbridled rages which disturbed one sportsman after another reduced me to such misery as I had never felt upon a desert or mountain expedition faced with storm, thirst, treachery and bandits. I knew it was not worth while being miserable, but I could not help it. Unaware that my responsibility was shared—by the equally harassed colonel—I felt despairingly at fault for everything which went wrong. As a shoot, nothing

¹ 1937-38.

could have been more of a failure. As a psychological revelation, it was undoubtedly a success. For I regret to say—under the pressure of the Indian Company's delays, muddles, prevarications and penury—we all lost our usual senses. We disagreed about everything. Looking back, it seems to me we behaved as outrageously as children deprived of a coveted party. Only one thing united guns and tourists. That was their intense dislike of me. I am sure it was justified. I remember writing to Arthur, who—under such circumstances—is an unfailing refuge, "At least I've done one thing which most people would have found impossible. I have made twenty ordinary human beings abhor me for quite justifiable and adequate reasons—although they happen not to be right ones!" I hope Arthur laughed. I did not. The party finally fell to pieces in Calcutta, after a ludicrous sojourn in a jungle singularly devoid of all that should have been there—animal, mechanical and culinary.

While the disillusioned guns continued their arguments, I acquired an excellent lawyer, and with his assistance forced my employers to pay what they owed to me and to Guy Butler who was acting as secretary. The others preferred persuasion. This was useless. Upon my arrival in England, I sued the Company for our return fares. With the help of Keith Miller-Jones, my solicitor, and the best friend I have ever had, for he has 'lasted' through all my changes of habit, purpose and belief—I won the case. The Judge added to the verdict in my favour an encouraging summary of the difficulties with which I had had to contend.

It was all very satisfactory—except that I did not get paid, for the Indians conveniently went bankrupt. This must have comforted the 'guns', for they had preferred retreat to battle.

So far as I was concerned, India had not been entirely a loss. For when I escaped from the 'conducted party', I stayed with the Erskines in Madras and the Brabournes in Calcutta. Both these visits I very much enjoyed. I think if Lord Brabourne¹ had lived he would have been Viceroy and unusually successful. He had every quality for this—the most difficult task in the world. His wife, the beautiful Doreen, who loved India and served it so well, would have been equally effective—and liked—at Viceroy's house. Their conception of Governorship was formal, but they could not have been better hosts or rulers. The Erskines were different. Staying with them was like living in a pleasant country-house, where everyone, Indian or Briton, was welcome. There were gay, impromptu parties and much riding. Marjorie² and I used to go out to a 'park' far from the town. It belonged to an old palace. There were monkeys and deer. Great trees drooped over our heads. In the gathering dusk it was wild and sad. There was a flavour of that ancient historical India when Mahrattas and Rajputs

¹ Governor of Bengal.

² Lady Erskine, whose husband was Governor of Madras.

struggled—with incomparable courage—in the North, or Tippoo Sultan fought the English among the Southern forests.

There were ghosts, mailed or silken, in that park. I imagined them in the twilight. I felt their sorrow and that bewildered pain which is the heritage of India. For—if Chitor¹ be accepted as its spirit—no country has so endured or so achieved the epitome of heroism.

Some high-lights I remember of that journey, which began in Travancore and Cochin and continued through Orissa, across India to the Rajput States, and ended in Patiala. As soon as I travelled alone, the Princes, ruling two-fifths of India and a quarter of its subjects, were as usual exceedingly hospitable.

In Trivandrum, capital of Hindu Travancore, surrounded by a flood-tide of palms—like the oleographs of Clive's India which used to hang on schoolroom walls or the brown-spotted prints still to be found in the Army and Navy Club—I visited the young Maharajah and his mother. She is the titular Maharanee. For this state is a matriarchate. The children of the present ruler, brought up in the palace, will not reign. The throne will pass to their cousin, the son of the Maharajah's sister.

Through a host of covered wagons, drawn by fine white bullocks, with hoops of blue beads swinging above their foreheads, through streams of absurd little carts like decorated hencoops, between elephants and pilgrims and holy men streaked with lime, I drove to the palace set on a hill.

There I was received by their Highnesses.

Through several salons furnished in European fashion, we went to a charming drawing-room with walls and upholstery of pale blue.

The Maharajah, very slender, with a face like an ivory miniature, wore one of those complicated turbans spreading into a fan over the left ear.

His mother had draped many yards of fine white muslin in Grecian fashion so that it fell from shoulder to heel in lovely lines, showing only a scrap of tight, short-sleeved white bodice. Her head was bare, her very long black hair, steeped in oil, drawn back into an enormous loose knot on her shoulders. She wore no jewels.

A power in the land and conscious of it, the Maharanee, speaking, like her son, a much better English than mine, said, "Naturally, the women in Travancore have a great deal of authority. The throne and all the great inheritances pass from mother to son, from sister to nephew, so we feel ourselves responsible for the future of the country.² As a race we have never been conquered. The Moghuls who overran Northern India did not come as far south as Travancore, so we have never had to submit to purdah. The Hindu women here have never known the veil."

¹ The ancient Rajput stronghold, three times sacked.

² There are 675 Princely states in India. Of these the most important are allied by Treaty with the British Crown.

With the laugh of a young girl, this princess of a race so ancient that it is reputed to be descended from the gods, added, "I believe we are even ahead of you in England. You are going to see the men's colleges, aren't you? Well, you will find a number of women teachers and lecturers there. We have got women doctors and lawyers, of course, and we have just appointed a woman judge."

"What are your problems then?" I asked, and the golden-brown Maharanee, with a smile which a poet described as "sunshine flashing on swords drawn in battle", answered, "One of our chief difficulties is to find employment for all the young people who come out of our colleges with a liking for town life and no desire at all to go back to the land."

This is the same problem from Hungary to Colombo. After the war, with the school age raised in England, we may have it in our own country.

By way of contrast to Trivandrum, I remember a camp in Periyar forest. There is the veritable kingdom of elephants. "You may find a herd right across the road, and if they have young, you will not be able to go any farther." So the Maharajah had warned me, adding, "Last week an indignant cow, thinking a motor had come too near her calf, turned the car upside down. It is a mercy she did not tramp on it as well."

In Periyar the earth belongs to elephants. From them the people take refuge in trees. When I woke on the first morning—in a reed hut, with a bandicoot like a nice, fat, furry rat, sitting on his hind legs to look at me, and a mongoose eating a snake under my bed—I saw, through gaps in the wall, a herd coming down to the lake. They were on the farther shore—several great tusked, a lot of females, and three babies. It was amusing to watch them drawing the water up in their trunks and blowing it, in best shower-bath fashion, over their backs.

Something startled them and they pounded out of the water. The tusked put up their trunks and trumpeted defiance while the rest of the herd made for the jungle. In his struggles to get out one baby lost his footing and rolled over. Two of the males seized his legs and pulled him along like a bundle.

Later in the morning we set off in the same direction—in a long, dug-out canoe paddled by a strange assortment of red-brown men, none of whom came up to my shoulder. One had a bow and arrow with which he proposed to shoot fish, if he saw any nice plump ones in the shallows. Another had a sling and a handful of stones, the pathetic defence of his people against elephants.

A forest ranger explained to me, "Their whole life is spent in terror of elephants. At the first cry of 'Ani'¹ every villager leaves the ground. It is like a flock of monkeys taking to the trees. Mothers with babies on their backs go up the tall ladders to the tree-houses

¹ Elephant.

quicker than you or I could run up the steps of a porch. The men get their drums and make as much noise as possible, but they won't leave the tree-tops. From the little platforms in front of their refuges they shoot their arrows and sling their stones, while the elephants, unaffected by such feeble missiles, go on eating the mealie crops and the patches of sugar-cane."

Between the drowned trees, which stuck out of the water, bleached as skeletons, we paddled until we came to a back-water where a river of tadpoles swam in a solid black line towards the lake. With cries of delight, our crew sprang overboard. They did not care whether we upset or not. Here was food for a week!

Knee-deep in water and fat black pulp which would eventually turn into bull-frogs nearly the size of soup-plates, they plunged their arms. Out of the wriggling mass they drew up handfuls of lunch and dinner.

The bodies of the tadpoles were rather larger than shillings, with plump, pennon-shaped tails an inch or two long. One of the little men thrust a fistful into his mouth, then choked and spluttered as some of the tadpoles wriggled out again and flopped from his chin to his chest.

Cautiously we made our way up a thread of a path with the forest hanging over us, towards fragments of open hill-side where the tree-men had planted their yams, which are like long and knobbly potatoes.

Besides the poor little crops, always at the mercy of elephants, were the oddest houses I have ever seen. Each consisted of a single room like a straw hamper, balanced on a platform. This projected perhaps four feet in front of the hole, serving as door and window combined some forty feet above the ground.

Most of the houses were built on the top of shortened trunks, so that they looked like top-heavy growths, but some were constructed in the clefts of branches with creepers trained as curtains. The only means of approach were the long ladders with rungs wide apart, clumsily made of the nearest forest material.

I did not enjoy climbing the tallest ladders, which shook in protest at my size. "Oh, dear, I have never seen so large a woman!" wailed the little tree people, thinking of me perhaps as kin to the elephants, their enemies and at the same time their gods. For anything so big, so strong and so impossible to destroy must surely be divine.

Inside the straw houses there was nothing but a bed made of reeds mounted on split cane, and a few jars and cooking-pots of clay.

"These people have no possessions," said the forest ranger. "They have no use for money. They are quite happy because they have nothing to lose—except, of course, their lives."

"But they aren't happy!" I protested. "They live in continual terror. At any moment a rogue elephant may come along and shake down their houses—just for fun."

"That is the privilege of a god," said my companion. At that moment there was a horrified scream. "Ani! Ani!"

A tiny brown woman came running down the hill. The head of the baby on her back nearly wobbled off its neck. Then from every side came other startled brown figures. The ladders swayed and sagged under the weight of the fugitives.

Cries and the terrified thudding of drums, a frantic search for weapons—one little man beat an empty bottle against what might once have been the lid of a biscuit-box—all this heralded the approach of two enormous elephants.

Unheeding, the great beasts passed. Evidently they were not hungry. The little people prostrated themselves in gratitude, but they dared not yet leave their sky houses.

"What shall I give them?" I asked.

"Tell them you'll send salt," instructed the ranger. "It is the only thing they want. They cannot get it in the forest. It is wealth and food and medicine combined. They will be quite ready to worship you—on the same level as an elephant—if you send them a pound or two of salt."

Which of these is India to Mr. Wendell Willkie, or to the beautiful and brilliant Madame Chang Kai-Shek—Trivandrum with its unveiled women as doctors and lawyers, or Periyar forest with its tree-dwellers and the primitive aboriginals who live naked in secret caves, beyond reach of any human contact?

In Denkanal, one of the twenty-six feudatory states of Orissa, the Rajah sent elephants to pick his guests out of the train. In the dusk they looked like small, perambulant mountains. Soon they blotted out the windows of our coach. From the high steps, we clambered on to their backs. With some difficulty we arranged ourselves, clinging to any support that offered. The great beasts heaved themselves slowly to their feet.

In darkness we started not down the solitary red road which led, in circuitous fashion, to the town, but up a bank thick with trees and then straight across country. I imagined I was riding a leviathan which breasted the rollers of an ocean. Immeasurably below me, the bush rolled in wave after wave of thick dusk, crested sometimes with a spume of paler leaves, or a flowering creeper. I felt there was no obstacle to unlimited progress. Slowly and inevitably, we should surmount the ranges and the rivers, the night itself, until we reached, at last, the stars. These hung low and near. The brightest of them seemed to have been caught in the hills. I realized, after some time, that these were the lights of the palace.

The mahout, speaking a dialect, said that my elephant was called Sura Sundari. A name should have made her a trifle more companionable, but she acted in a god-like fashion which prevented any feeling of intimacy. Trees, huts appeared and disappeared. Bulk without form passed below us. Sura Sundari never put a foot wrong. After a period of time which I made no attempt to measure, for riding at

night on an elephant or a camel has always seemed to me an undimensional pleasure, we came from the thick, sweet-smelling darkness pricked by the sharpness of the stars, into a street. It was a narrow street, hazed with dust, in which sat crowds of brown men selling scraps—of what I do not know. In front of them were baskets and cloths spread with odds and ends. Some had stalls lit with tapers. Others sat upon the earth behind small, flickering fires. I had an impression of the whole town selling in the shadow of cardboard houses. The walls of these had no substance. They were pasted flat against the sky. The doors and windows were daubed, as if in paint. It was all completely unreal. The wisps of fire blooming in the dust lit one side of a face, half a figure, the slope of a shoulder, a head bent over an indistinguishable body. Sura Sundari plodded through this human mirage. Nobody moved. There was no sound except a cheap gramophone playing in the distance.

As we turned out of the street drugged with merchants, unnaturally shrunken, their odds and ends of wares and their carpet-bedding of lights, the mahout explained to me that Sura Sundari could be relied upon. She was indeed a personage. Specially trained for hunting, she knew she had to charge as soon as she heard a shot fired from her back, so that, if the tiger happened to be wounded, she could finish him off with her tusks.

In the court of the palace, a pleasant white building standing on a rise above a broad, open space bordered with trees, lay the body of a fine sambur, shot by one of the young Princes. The elephants did not stop at the foot of the ramp. They went straight up it, under an archway and knelt at the entrance to a reception-room. The Rajah received us in a large hall, hung with portraits of his Rajput ancestors and furnished with heavy carved blackwood. He is a strong, short man, squarely-built, with much charm of manner and eager eyes. I imagine those eyes see a great deal. Behind them there must be a keen and sensitive intelligence. Above all, I should say that the Rajah of Denkhanal is kind and just.

We had not been talking for more than five minutes when he said, "Let us go and see if we can find a tiger. It is rather late, but I know a good water-hole quite close——"

Within a few minutes we had piled into a huge saloon car, the Rajah at the wheel, myself beside him, Guy Butler and the shikaris behind. As soon as we reached the forest, each huntsman produced a torch, directing the powerful beam upon the jungle closing in on either side. For a mile or two we drove slowly and in silence. Then we saw one enormous yellow eye—a round bright spot amidst a tangle of branches. We stopped, and in the same second our host had his rifle ready, the barrels projecting under the open windscreen, but he got no chance of a shot. A second eye appeared as the tiger turned away and slid into the jungle.

To a formal shoot—from machaans¹ fixed in trees—the Rajah drove me another day, straight across country in a consciously resilient car. "I cannot make the country people build their houses in anything like fireproof fashion," exclaimed my host, as we drove through what looked like a jumble of small haystacks, leaning one against another. "Look at this village! It is burned down regularly every year, but they rebuild it at once with the houses much too close together and all made of straw."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when I noticed two brown hummocks in the middle of the track. They resolved themselves into bodies prostrated with their heads in the dust. "That means a petition," explained the Rajah, stopping the car. Eagerly the slight brown men thrust scraps of paper through the windows, after which they again rolled themselves into balls level with the foot-boards. "They both ask the same thing," said our host. "They want to erect two more houses in an overcrowded village where my officers have wisely refused to license further buildings."

His Highness took much trouble to explain the situation before driving on, and the suppliants shouted after him: "Take thou the name of God!" which is their flattering version of our "God Save the King".

Within half a mile we were stopped again, this time by a good-looking youth with a panther skin over his shoulders, who thrust a long poem into the hands of his Ruler. The first twenty verses dealt with the good fortune of Denkhanal in having such a Prince, and the twenty-first asked for a job—any job—in the palace.

The royal car proceeded, sometimes through herds of water-buffaloes. "I believe in being accessible to my people," said the Rajah. "Anybody can talk to me who likes. I think the days are past when a ruler could be unapproachable and autocratic."

After a few more miles a tyre burst. Buffaloes surrounded us. "Do not get out," instructed my host. "Sometimes they are savage with strangers." But he himself leaped out of the car and helped a boy to drive the great, lumbering beasts out of the way. After this, equally effectively, he assisted the chauffeur to change the wheel.

On again we went. With the sun well down, His Highness suggested visiting one of his forest schools where the half-naked little brown men are taught to read and write and do simple sums.

"Do they need education?" I asked.

"If they know some arithmetic, they are not cheated when they go to market to buy cloth or a treat in the way of food," replied my host. But he agreed with me that medicine is more important for the jungledwellers than any other form of learning.

I liked staying at Denkhanal because it reminded me of a big English estate. There was the same link of interest and mutual purpose be-

¹ Small platforms.

tween the Rajah and his subjects as existed in the Lincolnshire of my childhood between the squires and their farmers or villagers.

CHAPTER XII

1938

Fairy-tale in Patiala

IN DHOLPUR I found an equally beneficent ruler, but—of necessity—on a scale more royal. With the Maharaj Rana of Dholpur, descended from a ruling House which lost its first known principality to Alexander the Great,¹ I stayed in a palace built by the Moghul Emperor—Shah Jehan.

From the thriving capital, with its busy markets and sense of growth, I had driven out into dry bush, alternately red and grey. Ruins of ancient buildings, fortresses or temples, were red-gold splashes upon the hill-sides. It was a dramatic country. Wild boar, panther, and a lynx with delicately tufted black ears, trotted between the bushes, or stared at us gravely without taking the trouble to move. We saw hyenas, jackals and foxes, all toning with the dappled forest, so much a part of it that it seemed as if the earth took shape in their movements. Chinkara, lightest and most graceful of deer, leaped over the middle distances with the effect of branches blown about by the wind. Sambur, the Indian elk, stood in the middle of the road. A blue bull, massively indigo, remained as motionless as an idol in a wayside shrine. Where the bush gave way to open spaces, burned to amber, there was a scurry of mongoose or hare. Beyond all this, no more motionless than the blue bull whom I had difficulty in crediting, rose the cardboard-thin walls of castles long ago deserted, or the broken dome of a tomb.

The red haze persisted as we drove, for the earth is the colour of dry blood, until it breaks into vivid green round Talshahi, the royal lake. Here in an exquisite petal-red palace, set on a terrace, with a causeway bearing a crown of domed pagodas, which look as if they might be blown away at any moment, stretching far into the water, His Highness seeks respite from the cares of a kingdom which is also a family estate.

The arches of the great hall open straight on to the water.

Through them, while we waited for lunch, I saw enormous crimson fishes leap into the air. Flocks of rose-coloured ibis drifted across

¹ 334-331 B.C.

the shallows. Duck were flying in close formation and snake-birds, swimming with their bodies submerged and only their long necks writhing out of the water.

For the lake is sanctuary. Not even a serpent may be killed within the precincts of this forest Eden.

On the other side of the red palace the Maharaj Rana has boldly created a golf course, where he plays every morning—in mid-jungle—with his A.D.C.s.

Tiger probably watch with mild amusement, knowing they are quite safe, for the ruler of Dholpur dislikes killing.

Good-looking, intelligent and a great reader, His Highness divides his time between the Chamber of Princes in Delhi, of which he was once vice-president, and his own State, in which he is regarded as a father and a god.

Driving himself in an immensely long car, the Maharaj Rana goes to every corner of his kingdom and is known to every peasant.

In a small village where the houses were like gaily coloured boxes opening straight into the street, I saw every man, woman and child rush out to welcome him.

"Our ruler, our ruler!" they shouted.

The whole crowd was united in one ecstatic smile. It seemed to me the enormous car was surrounded and at last submerged in that smile.

Every conceivable offering was poured over us. We might have progressed over the backs and shoulders of delighted adorers.

When, at last, the Maharaj Rana contrived to extricate his yards and yards of car, he took me to see his other friends, the biggest of the deer.

In gathering dusk, we waited under the walls of another palace. We heard the great stags belling and then the sound of soft footfalls on the leaves.

One by one enormous sambur stepped out of the shadows. The leaders seemed to have no fear at all.

They trooped close up to the car and thrust their noses into the windows. Servants came from the palace with sugar-cane and flat cakes of bread.

"They will eat out of your hand. Try," said my host.

A stag with mighty antlers allowed me to provide him with a good meal.

More and more came out of the forest until there must have been thirty or forty gathered round us, and in the distance others galloped.

"Those are newcomers," explained His Highness. "They are not certain about me yet, but in a year or two they will be as tame as my friends here."

He patted the largest sambur as if it had been a dog.

The Maharaj Rana of Dholpur is a philosopher as well as a statesman and a conscientious agriculturalist.

Deeply interested in his own and other religions, he will talk for hours

about reincarnation and his views on the gradual evolution of Hinduism.

In the great red hall, not unlike a cathedral, for the roof is multiple arched and supported by a host of pillars, surrounded by A.D.C.s in their hunting khaki, or wearing their evening coats of rich blue with turbans like poppies, he exercised his gifts as a story-teller.

But they were always true tales.

So I learned about the little girl in a neighbouring State or Province who, when she was about eight years old, startled her parents by saying she had once been the wife of a certain farmer and the mother of his now grown-up family.

Her relatives thought she was crazy, but the village wiseacre insisted that she should be taken to see the man whom she claimed had been her husband in a previous life.

It was a three days' journey, but when the girl arrived at the house that she had certainly never seen in this life, she knew her way about it.

She knew the names and habits of all the family.

She commented on the changes made in the last ten years, and she showed, correctly, where the farmer's wife had died.

Finally she insisted on climbing up into a hole under the roof.

"I hid some money here," she explained.

Within a few minutes she had found the exact amount she mentioned, in the place where, without hesitation, she had gone to look.

This extraordinary occurrence was reported at the time in an Indian paper, but told first-hand by a man who had been sufficiently impressed to make inquiries on the spot, it gained value.

"Reincarnation is the most logical explanation of all the inequalities and the misfortunes that seem to us inexplicable," suggested the Maharaj Rana.

At that moment he might have been any one of his hundred ancestors, Jats and kin to the fighting Rajputs, once monarchs of a much larger kingdom, heirs of the great god Krishna, who, according to legend, drove the herds of his adopted shepherd father across the Dholpur plains. Next instant he had swept us out of the fragile crimson palace, with its row of little pavilions marching into the lake.

We passed the secretive red walls behind which lives the Maharanee, an enchanting Princess of a very old Punjab family kin to the most famous of its Kings. Her favourite colour in the decoration of her rooms—like Lady Willingdon's—is purple. Her only child, a daughter, slight and active, has not yet succeeded in defeating her father at Badminton.

For a moment I thought of their jewels, which the elder Princess still wears in Indian fashion, a cascade of diamonds falling over her brow and a circle of the same precious stones swinging above her upper lip, while the younger, lovely as a Persian miniature, has a single ruby which almost covers a finger.

She dropped it negligently out of the zenana window one day, and

was surprised when I insisted on rushing down at once to hunt for it in the long grass.

The Maharaj Rana himself wears, on State occasions, a necklace of nine strings of fabulous pearls and a collar in which the pearls are really nearly as large as plovers' eggs.

But when we had hurried, first into a car and then into a superlative and very silent launch, I forgot the fantastic India of jewels and veiled princesses, even the India of little girls who recognize their sexagenarian husbands of a previous life.

For off we went into an unfenced zoo.

The Maharaj Rana knew the habits and haunts of every animal. I expected him to call the crocodiles by name. They lay like tree-trunks, half in and half out of the water.

Monkeys with tails curved into hoops thronged the banks just out of reach of their jaws. Deer of all sizes crept timidly about the creeks. Sambur belled. A tiger roared.

An old bear, disturbed by so much noise, came lumbering out of the rocks to see what it was all about. A little fox sat on his haunches undisturbed. With very bright eyes he looked about him, but the birds made a great deal of fuss. Blue-jays and brilliant bulbuls, kingfishers, pelicans breasted like dowagers, cranes, ibis and herons, a flock of flamingos with scarlet under their wings, hoopoes fashionably striped, hawks, pigeons, the hunters and the hunted, all these rose hurriedly into the air, or higher into the clouds. Duck and snake-birds, the wary geese who keep themselves to themselves, snobs in a world where, suitably enough, democracy is at the mercy of outlawed force, plunged into the water. The tiger roared again. It was a hoarse, complaining sound. The little fox whisked round and disappeared. "I look upon them all as my family," said the descendant of nomad warriors, the Ruler of a model state.

With the young—and somewhat fabulous—Maharajah of Jaipur, I stayed in the 'only city of India built upon a regular plan'—at a time when London, two hundred years ago, had no plan at all. So many ancient capitals are hastily described as 'rose-red'. Petra originated the facile combination of words. Lalibela among the mountains of Abyssinia and Bamian in an Afghan valley inherited it. But all these are, in reality, the dusky purplish reds of hewn rock stained by centuries of storm and dust. Only Jaipur is the clear pink of oleanders and sugar-cakes or, I regret to say—of the best flannelette. I think it is the most attractive town in Asia. It is so ecstatically over-decorated and encrusted—like all the best and pinkest sweetmeats.

Everybody who can possibly contrive it goes to Jaipur. There is no other place quite like it, and no other Maharajah with such an appeal to popular sentiment. For the young man who rules—wisely and well—this proud state of Rajputana, double the size of Wales, with a population approximating to three millions, is as fabulous in his way

as the treasure in Tiger Fort. He is a first-class polo player, an excellent shot, undefeatable as a horseman, and willing to try anything new the wide world over. When I stayed in Jaipur he had just broken an arm in the Indian polo final and—until he could get back on to a horse—he was learning to fly one of the fastest planes in the country.

Mr. Somerset Maugham was staying in the guest-house—buying ruby cuff-links and talking of Yogi as if it were a condition of skin to be acquired by treatment. I have enjoyed his short stories—in a plane for four days on end between the Rio Plate and French Guiana. But I do not think their author has enjoyed life. He has perhaps become confused between the price of success and its value.

That year Patiala gave me the most vivid impression of India, but such moments of insight and of deep feeling are not easy to express. They are different for everybody. Read Captain Tod¹ or Aldous Huxley on the subject of Rajputana and this becomes evident.

It happened that I was staying at the Baradari Palace in Patiala during the last week of His Highness's illness. The atmosphere of the pleasant white house, furnished with an enchanting collection of inherited chaos, reflected what was happening under the acres of oleander-coloured roof, where, in the modern palace, a host of relatives, Ministers, courtiers, and doctors waited upon the health of the man who had certainly been to his own people a *Roi Soleil*, torrid, violent and munificent. Above me lodged some of the younger Princes, sons-in-law of the Maharajah, and their staffs. Below me, the great halls, with windows opening on to porches where pigeons kept up a soft, monotonous lament, were full of portraits of dead Maharajahs all wearing the same jewels. In spite of the conventions and the limitations of the artists, their subjects had a certain life. I imagined them impatient of their silks and their diamonds, longing to get out into the open, with sword and horse and something to be won. But there was sensuality in the full lips between the carefully curled moustaches and the beards, rolled, according to Sikh custom, over a fine black string tied under the turban. While I talked with the young Princes, one tall and thin, the other too good-natured to be anything but plump, or with a succession of A.D.C.s in faultless jodhpurs who had always just dismounted from or were about to mount thoroughbreds, I used to study the unyielding eyes and the emotional lips of the portraits.

One day there was laughter in the Baradari Palace. Everybody moved quickly. Even the cooks excelled themselves. For, from the monumental Royal Palace, whose pink façade went on and on, apparently for ever, above a terrace thronged with courtiers in turbans of a colour reflecting their moods, came news. The Maharajah had sent for his barber. Subsequently it was learned that, much to the consternation of his doctors, he had spent no less than two hours on his bath and the care of his beard. Being a Sikh and first among the Sikh

¹ *Chronicles of Rajasthan.*

Princes, it was necessary that every hair should be oiled till it shone like silk. Then it was rolled neatly over a cord and tied round the chin.

Subsequently his turban must be considered. When it was known that he had chosen to wear cherry-coloured muslin over a lilac head-band, everybody in the gigantic pink sugar-cake building was delighted.

His Highness must certainly be better.

It was curious how the personality of this fabulous monarch, whom I never saw, dominated my stay in Patiala.

For weeks the Maharajah had been ill. From every part of India brothers and cousins, sons and sons-in-law, had gathered under the eleven acres of his roof.

Every afternoon there was a royal gathering in the central saloon—a sky-high apartment furnished with admirably comfortable English chairs and sofas and decorated almost entirely with signed photographs of European royalties.

From the piano gazed three generations of British monarchs.

The kings and queens of every country, from Portugal to the Balkans, from Stockholm to Cairo, scintillated in jewelled frames upon the tables.

Goanese butlers served tea and a great many delicious cakes.

In the place of honour sat the Maharaj Rana of Dholpur in a sky-blue turban, closer rolled than those of Patiala, and a smoke-blue coat.

For generations his house had been closely allied with that of our host. In stormier times, when it was dangerous to leave an heir-apparent among the plots and intrigues of his father's court, a boy prince of one state sometimes found refuge with the other.

Next in rank came the Rajah of Patna, a tall, spectacled youth who always wore white, the ruler of an Eastern State, married to Patiala's daughter, and his brother-in-law, a Prince of Nepal, plump and gay, with a great sense of humour.

Then there was the good-looking Maharaj Kumar Bujindra Singh, with a red beauty-spot above his eyebrows.

He talked of the teak-trees he was planting and the new irrigation canals and his collection of pheasants from every part of the world.

The Prime Minister, with an immense flare of purple muslin spurring out of the top of his pointed golden cap, talked of the proposed Constitution, which, in a year or so, would modernize the Government.

But the young Princes talked of the ghost which haunts the Baradari Palace.

"It is a little old woman who walks up the staircase just beside your rooms," said the Rajah of Patna. "Have you not heard her steps?"

His brother-in-law continued: "Last night we came in late, and I thought I would give you a fright, so I tried to walk like a ghost, with a great deal of rustling, you know—I put two big crackling leaves over my shoes—but you were asleep and would not listen!"

Always the conversation came back to the Maharajah who lay ill in a vast pillared room overlooking the lake and the zenana palace. There hundreds of lovely women were supposed to live, among magnificent gardens where white peacocks drift about like ghosts between ivory pavilions and fountain-filled canals.

I imagined the hidden potentate as our Henry VIII. He was, I knew, an enormous jovial man who ate fifty pounds of food every day and gave away a month's revenue if peasants appealed to him because they had a poor crop.

"He used to say he ate only one meal a day," murmured an A.D.C., "but once he sent for me in the afternoon, and while he talked to me of business he consumed three whole chickens with his tea."

A Prince with ruby rings in his ears added, "After dinner, while we were eating dessert, an enormous gold dish with a locked cover used to be brought in and set before the Maharajah. He would unlock it himself, and inside there would be any number of dishes made with rice and meat and all sorts of sweet things. These he would eat with his fingers. As soon as a dish was empty it would be refilled."

The Maharajah loved life and food and women and jewels. Because he was so splendid and rich, so extravagant, so generous and hospitable, because he shot well and drove his enormous cars at a fantastic pace and stopped them at once if the poorest of his subjects wanted to talk to him, because he laughed and scattered money into the hands of beggars, his people were genuinely attached to him.

They did not care if they were oppressed or not. Probably they did not even feel oppressed, because they could always go to the palace with its miles of rose-pink wall and its stupendous pink façade rising straight out of a redder terrace—and they could be sure of seeing their ruler.

Sometimes the fabulous man, who ought to have been a Mogul emperor conquering and spending in the lavish fashion of the Middle Ages, would sit in a white marble pavilion scarcely bigger than a hutch and listen to the petitions brought from all over the country. He would distribute a great deal of encouragement and sound advice with promises of pardon or a subsidy. The suppliants would go away enchanted.

In the evenings we used to go out with some of the Princes in an immense grey and silver car with arm-chair seats.

All the courtiers promenading on the red terrace, or standing talking in earnest groups, their poppy-red, yellow, green or tobacco-brown turbans like a flower-bed in full bloom, their beards neatly tucked up and strung around their chins, would turn to look at us.

The guard would present arms. And quite possibly, before we left the garden, we would come upon a procession of perambulators, each containing a brown-eyed baby, each pushed with the utmost solemnity by a bearded Sikh. I heard that in one week no less than six children had been born to the monarch.

As the dozen or twenty royal infants passed, the guards saluted again.

Nobody knows the size of this Maharajah's family, but he was credited with at least eighty-seven sons and daughters, just as he was credited with the largest diamond in India and an overdraft even bigger than his treasure of jewels and gold.

He had an annual income of about two million pounds.

When the grey and silver car left the last of the palace enclosures, the populace was apt to fling itself upon the running-boards with the feeling that the nearer it got to the ruling family the better chance it had of heaven.

In the country, where nothing has changed for five hundred years or so, peasants would leave their fields and do a little diffident worship at a distance before going home to their families and saying, "I shall have good fortune. I saw the Maharajah's son to-day."

The most conservative among them probably considered that all their sins would be remitted because they had caught a glimpse of a god.

For Patiala, like many other states, is completely feudal. Most of the people know nothing of politics. Some of them believe that Queen Victoria still reigns in London.

I talked to one old man who assured me that the English Queen, of whom he had heard from father and grandfather, was entirely responsible for the peace and security in which he lived.

"Before she ruled, there were dacoits (brigands) all over the land. Even within the walls of my house I wasn't safe! Now I can drive my cows where I will."

Educated youth in the towns, which are, after all, only large villages, may talk of Congress and admire its methods, but the country people don't read and they don't think.

They know about God and the Maharajah, and some Deputy Commissioner who is a great man with much power, to whom they must pay respect because he is concerned with taxes and the law, but beyond this their minds do not function.

CHAPTER XIII

1938

*'Pilgrimage to Mother Ganges.' Prince and Merchant.
Diverse Gods. England and India*

MY LAST VENTURE in India that winter was to visit Hardwar for the Kumbh Mela, which is one of the largest festivals in the Hindu world. It is concerned with Mother Ganges—the great river which gives life



- 1 Off the map in Albanian mountains. Colonel "Michael" Stirling—encyclopedist of the Balkans—Rosita Forbes, and Stroud Read from the British Museum

- 2 Coronation Day Up-country in Tanganyika

- 3 The McGraths in Kenya

- 4 My mother, Rosita Torr (left), Rosita Forbes, and Dr Dean of Collingham, who mended me persistently for as long as I can remember

- 5 Visiting a carpet factory between lectures in Scotland

- 6 With Mr Gordon Selfridge



PURPOSE, PLACE, AND PEOPLE

Photos 5 R L Stewart 6 F W Crouch





1 In Central America

2 A racer in Uruguay

3 In Patagonia

4. With the Commandant and Sergeant of Assyrian Battery Iraq Levies in Diana Camp, Kurdistan



HORSES MEAN MORE TO
ME THAN MEN



and gently takes the dead—when they have been burned upon her ghats. With Indian friends, I went slowly, very slowly because of the crowds, between the towering white rest-houses, endowed by religious benefactors so that pilgrims could be lodged free of charge. But these buildings do not house a tenth or a hundredth part of the crowds which camp upon the river banks, hang like locusts upon the trees, swarm over the flat roofs and lie close as a drugget upon the paving-stones between the pool and the sugar-white temples, heaped with marigold heads. Thousands of cook-shops spring up overnight, but they cannot cope with the hunger of a million pilgrims. All along the Ganges there are cooking-pots and fragmentary shelters made of canvas, rusty metal, branches or torn umbrellas. The only possible means of progress at night is on an elephant. Even this great beast, stepping delicately as Agag, may find himself wedged stationary among a crowd, mad with delight because at last it has reached its physical and spiritual goal.

The famous pool is approached by the narrowest of lanes between houses, whose walls soar up, unbroken as cliffs. At the corner of this tortuous street where the dusk is thickened with smoke and dust, where the lights are reflected in a reddish haze, stands a lodging-house comparable to an East End tenement.

Normally its crumbling cubicles, unfurnished but for a cracked rope bedstead, would command a few pennies a night from wayfarers indifferent to a press of company, to doors without bolts and shutters hanging from broken hinges. During the month of pilgrimage the landlord could rent them over and over again at two or three pounds a night. It was from the roof of this warren-like building, swarming with the noblest lodgers, that I looked down on Hardwar after sunset. Streams and rivers of light spread between the village and the scattered camps. They were reflected on the broad river. Starlight and torchlight waged battle. From the hills, from the clefts between the houses, from the shining waterways, came caravans, came processions, all bearing lights. There was a confused sound of bells and stringed instruments. Far away, I heard men singing. "We must go down," said my Indian friends. I saw that they longed to be in the middle of the crowd. They wanted to lose themselves in its unity of purpose, to share its friendliness, its passion and its awe.

Down the thread-like stairways drawn through the walls, we stumbled. Deeper and deeper into the orange haze we walked. Our feet sank into drifts of marigold heads. Amber robes brushed against us.

At last we reached the tiers of steps rising in a wide semi-circle above the pool.

It was bright moonlight. All round the pool and as far as I could see along the banks of the great river was a white carpet of humanity. The people were so closely packed that I could not distinguish between

the figures. Their heads were shrouded. Like tall hooded lilies, they bent, colourless, towards their massed reflection in the water.

From the many temples came the sound of drums and singing. Through the open doors I could see priests in marigold yellow moving before altars which appeared to be golden.

Suddenly the music rose in triumph. There was a crash of brass instruments, and simultaneously hundreds—no, I suppose, thousands—of toy boats, heaped with flowers and each bearing a light, were launched upon the Ganges. Priests and holy men—the latter dressed only in their own long matted hair, with streaks of lime on their bodies—forced their way to the pool and pushed out upon its waters flaming boat-shaped receptacles.

The night was immediately filled with fire. The pool itself seemed to be dyed red, for the temple 'boats' burned with rich-coloured flames. And the whole surface of the river flared with the strange lights produced by smouldering spices.

Away and away drifted the thousands of craft, leaving trails of scented smoke, blue, purple and sombre brown in the moonlight. If their fires lasted till a certain turn of the river, the prayers which had attended their launching would be answered. If the flames burned out too soon, misfortune would befall the worshippers responsible.

So triumph and lament alternated on the river banks, while Mother Ganges bore, blazing away, the hopes of a million of her children.

I had put on an Indian sari to be less noticeable among the crowd, and I remember, just at the moment when I had forgotten everything but the astonishing beauty of the river on fire, one of my Indian friends whispered to me anxiously, "What have you done to your sari? You have got your feet through the hem and the rest is all bunched round your waist!"

With a shock I realized that I stood bare-headed amidst the shrouded throng, clutching yards and yards of embroidered muslin as if it had been a crumpled bath towel. But nobody else noticed. Their eyes were on the holy Mother Ganges.

Later, when the crowd was beginning, not to dissolve, for the myriad worshippers would spend the night by the river, but to re-establish its multiplicity of different entities, we moved, with the pressure of the masses guiding us, down to the quay. Here shadow and light were sharply diapered as if there had been a paving of black-and-white marble. The bulk of dreaming bulls, garlanded with flowers, loomed out of the tapestry of people, all seated, most of them reading or talking. Under the flaring lights I met a Maharaj Kumar whom I knew. He was second heir to one of the great Hindu Principalities, and his parents possessed a house in the village. At the moment it was crowded with relations, for those who do not make pilgrimage to Hardwar go there for the sake of the fair and the shows. I met numerous young Indians, barristers, doctors, government employees,

who had brought their wives to see the spectacle and indulge in the fun of the enormous fair where everything from immortality to a love potion can be had for prayer or money.

With my princely acquaintance I wandered along the quay and talked of Hinduism. For, within a few yards, we had passed a grave, quiet man, very thin and clean, wrapped in a spotless white robe, with gold-rimmed spectacles on his nose, and a great bulging hulk of a man naked but for a strip of leather and some garlands of marigolds, his hands and feet very dirty and striped with what looked like blood but was probably henna paste. In the first—who sat on a small Persian rug and talked earnestly to an intelligent young Indian of the educated classes, referring at times to a document written in Sanskrit—I recognized a famous teacher. The other, wrapped in good-natured fat, was shouting and laughing with a number of equally bedaubed creatures. They paid him a certain amount of homage. “Both those men are Sadhus,” I said. “It is difficult to understand.”

The Maharaj Kumar replied that probably the way of holiness represented by the fat Sadhu, who held a begging-bowl and many strings of beads, amulets and charms, would appeal to the masses, because ignorance could only be satisfied by symbols. By means of casting horoscopes and telling fortunes, the teacher who, in spite of his bulk, was a notable ascetic, gained an ascendancy over the minds of superstitious people.

On we went through the inchoate mass of priests, widows unadorned and blurred with ashes, sacred bulls, some of them very thin, pilgrims, beggars, ‘crims’ intent on pillage, ascetics with bloodless faces, peasant women in every violent colour, spectacted merchants, fakirs, dervishes, the clothed and the unclothed. At times we passed statues of the Hindu gods, Ganesh with his elephant trunk, and Kali the destroyer, dripping with blood. The Maharaj Kumar laid an offering in front of the most incoherent representation of divinity. It had a multitude of arms and I think no fingers. After a pause, he said, “How can anyone know what God is like? Do not you understand, the Indian painter or sculptor feels he cannot possibly know what the limbs which span all space are like, what is the appearance of the head which conceived a universe, or eyes which see everything. Sometimes he does not even indicate the existence of things so far beyond his knowledge. He leaves his gods without hands or feet or eyes, or else he gives them an inordinate number. All such paintings and carvings are symbolical. So are the different facets of the same God. Since God is everything, the Hindu can worship whichever aspect is most pleasing to himself.”

In India, the tolerance of those sufficiently advanced to worship the highest principle of the one God is more complete than in any other land I know. The masses, confused by substances and forms, worship according to the strangest cults, a whole pantheon of gods. The

most learned Brahmin, capable of expounding Hegelian metaphysics, will explain that a spiritless conception of the Almighty is beyond the apprehension of the millions in the Indian villages and back-streets. They must be allowed to embody the attributes of God—His mercy and His terror, His omnipotence—in concrete forms which naturally vary according to the educational level of the worshipper. Some forms are undoubtedly unpleasant, some childish, but no more so than the symbols of other faiths such as transubstantiation, a crucified body and the apparent worship of a lamb.

Whenever I have argued about the illogical sacredness of cows with Hindus accustomed to word chemistry, they have always retorted with the lamb. It is, to them, equally puzzling. For the swollen statues of bulls in Benares and other holy cities, they have retaliated with the haloed lambs in our stained-glass windows. "At least," said the Maharaj Kumar, "there is only one Hindu faith. We can have no converts. To be a Hindu, you must be born one. And every Hindu, whether he is a mystic or a fetishist, is of the same faith and way of life." It seemed to me then that this unity of faith—so different from anything in Christian Europe, split into hundreds of sects and in the Moslem countries still more fantastically divided—must give the Hindus a logical feeling of superiority. Not only from Britain but from the rest of the East are they separated by their religion, in which, to the outsider, doctrine and practice often seem at variance. "The only logical belief is reincarnation," said the tall young Maharaj Kumar. "It explains everything. It provides for everything. To the Hindu there is no need for fear or dismay. The succession of his lives are a ladder which he must eventually climb. He will know everything, enjoy and suffer everything. The sequence of his experiences cannot matter to him, since sooner or later he must undergo them all."

At this point in the conversation we stepped out of the way to avoid disturbing a cow. Bewilderment returned to me. It is difficult to apprehend why a mind which can visualize the Absolute should pay tribute, quite simply and honestly, to the various animals regarded as sacred in different parts of India. "Why not?" said the future ruler of a state larger than Wales. "The cow with us is a life principle, just as is bread to you. Without the cow, the Indian peasant could not live. It is a symbol of God's gift of life, as is your consecrated wafer. Only with us, religion is everywhere, a part of our everyday life, not shut away in a church. So the varying symbols of God—a friendly God or a heroic, a cruel, a vengeful, or a laughing and prolific God—are in our houses and our streets, on holiday with us and in our daily work. The Hindus want to take with them everywhere the comfort and companionship of God."

I asked my companion about other religions, but he was too polite to criticize. He said he thought Europeans must often be lonely and

that was an affliction unknown to the East. For, besides all the different forms of divinity inherent in the One God, satisfying to every need of the Hindu temperament, the Hindu religion ordains every form of personal, family and caste obligation. From the beginning to the end of his life, the Hindu is bound to his fellows. He could not repudiate his obligations without impoverishing his spiritual quality and imperilling his future material incarnations. Because of this close-built system of family and social life, India can dispense with the dole and poor relief. She can sincerely believe that one man can atone for the sins of many. Religion to the Hindu is not a matter of this life or the next, but of all time.

While the Maharaj Kumar talked as a philosopher familiar with the Sermon on the Mount as with the inspiration and solace of Bhagavad-Gita, I looked round for the friends with whom I had come to the festival. They were walking behind us, at the distance which they considered not so much respectful as suitable. For to them the social system was as unassailable as the Hindu religion of which it is a part. The caste of the warrior is above that of the merchant. I effected introductions in Western fashion and conversation moved on stilts. Between my friends there was courtesy, understanding, appreciation and a gap which neither wished to bridge.

With my Bunia hosts, I wandered back along the quays, and I thought it would be interesting to broach the subject which had turned the much-travelled heir-presumptive of 1938 into a disciple of that timeless Brahminism which raised the temples of Angkor on the edge of the known world. Much more practical than the descendant of Kings, they spoke with enthusiasm of Arya Samaj, the national religious movement founded, I believe, by Swami Dayananda Sarasvati just before our century. This Indian Brahmin, "a cultured, polite and speculative man", insisted that all men were equal. His theory was used against the British, whose 'gentleman-ideal' had first attracted and then disillusioned Indian imitators. From the Dayananda College came the call for a national rather than a European education, so that Indians might become 'the best possible members of their own community' rather than bad copies of Europeans.

The girl who had reproached me for putting my foot through the hem of my sari, finally told me that English literature had done a great deal for India by broadening the outlook of its readers, but that her countrymen were wasting their time trying to model themselves on the West. Arya Samaj had revolutionized Indian thought. Sufficiently studied and understood, it might lead not only to the solution of Indian spiritual problems, but of those material ones from which the West was suffering even more than the East.

Throughout what was quite a long speech, made under considerable difficulties because of the crowds, the girl's voice remained gentle and deliciously modulated. She was very pretty, and had taken a degree in

law before marrying a railway official and becoming the mother of several children.

In India, it seems to me, there are two great influences of which we are comparatively ignorant. There is the influence of women, immeasurable and unaccountable because it is scarcely conscious. It works, for the most part, very quietly, although occasionally a Begum Shah Nawaz or a poetess like Sarojini Naidu gives expression to the power in the home. There is also the influence of religion. If the beggars and hermits, the priests, dervishes and wandering friars, the holy men of India were counted, the list of those who eat without working, who live free on the generosity of their fellows, would astonish the economist.

Like the Brinjaras, the carriers who wander up and down India, too busy to talk or to sit down for a meal, so busy that children may be born on bullock-back, we of the West hurry about our business. We have no time to think.

From the steps of their monasteries, ascetics in saffron yellow watch our passage, unperturbed. It is to them no more than one of many processions which has passed across the Indian earth. They take no notice of our motors and our railways. They do not talk of their own philosophy which deprives them of individual names. They say, after a forty years' novitiate, "I am the little knowledge that I have acquired."

They sit in the dust, heedless of the world, muttering "Ram Ram." What we ask of parliaments, they leave to a familiar God.

So I saw India in the winter and spring of 1938. Much more I saw than I have written here. My book *India of the Princes* reaffirmed my belief in the diversity of a continent—ripened fruit of many thousand years—whose history we do not know. The fighting races of India, Rajputs, Gurkas, Pathans, Mahrattas, Dogras, Sikhs, have—in their internecine wars or against invaders—shown such fantastic courage as the West can hardly conceive. Her politicians have—at times—made mistakes on an equally dramatic scale. Britain, to my mind, has a place in either category. Her courage can rarely be attacked. Her politics are in less good case. But what is not generally conceded or appreciated is the dull, hard labour—unremitting and certainly unprofitable—which she has put into India. She has built, dredged, drained and farmed. She has doctored, schooled and protected, trained, scolded, encouraged—with the voices and in the persons of the ordinary unknown men whom she sends, year in and year out, on work little short of creation, from Cape Cormorin to the Himalayas. By these she is justified. For they have every right to look upon their achievements—so dull, repetitive, simple, tedious, that few critics are concerned with them—and to find them *good*.

CHAPTER XIV

1938

'Munich'—in Scotland and Grimsby

WHEN I RETURNED TO LONDON in the summer of 1938, Lord Runciman was in Czechoslovakia with his olive-branch which had no root. The whole of England was breathless. The sentimentalists would have fought without arms. The realists protested that Britain, having subscribed to Wilson's doctrine of racial and national self-determination, could not justifiably fight to prevent some millions of Sudeten Germans, exiled by the Treaty of Versailles, being restored to their Fatherland. It was heart-breaking for the Czechs. It was an extremely difficult problem for Whitehall.

That August we went to Scotland to stay as usual at Blair Drummond. Our hostess, Lady Muir, had been Nadejda Stancioff, daughter of the Bulgarian Foreign Minister and a French mother, with American and Dutch in-laws. Among her guests were the Fitzalan-Howards, representing surely the Catholic point of view since Henry is next heir to the Norfolk duchy, and Clare Sheridan, fervent internationalist and lover of Russia. There was also Sir Miles Lampson with news of Egypt and the Middle East, and Sir Ronald Storrs admirably equipped to argue with him. Over this party with its amazingly diverse knowledge, brooded Nadejda, stormy petrel of the Balkans. To it, as we left, came King Boris straight from Balmoral and his Italian Queen. Of it, I remember one incident. It was a conversation with a brilliant European who liked England and lived in our country. Sadly but as if it were incontrovertible fact, she said, "You have become a second-rate power. That you must acknowledge and accept. For Europe appreciates it and will act accordingly." I was so completely aghast that I could not speak. For here was neither censure nor criticism. It was what a reasonable and experienced woman, a great hostess in political and diplomatic worlds, thought of us. Gravely she continued, "After all, you have been powerful for a long time. A whole century—and more—has belonged to you. All empires rise and fall. It may be that you are coming to the end of yours. But history will not forget the great part you played. In the future you may have to be content with a minor role." By that time my expression must have given me away. For she took my arm. "Don't look like that. It is uncivilized. Surely it is not so important to be labelled a 'great power'. Holland and Belgium have colonies. They are prosperous and respected. If England slips into the same category—as indeed she has already done—does it matter so much?" What I said is much too raw to print, but I

hope that very great lady, still in England and working hard for us, remembers now what she said to me beside the river at Blair Drummond that August of 1938. Not the unicorn but the phoenix should partner Britain's lion!

To Bridge of Earn we went to stay with Shelagh Westminster in a house which she had taken—for its moor and its river. Hansel Pless, her nephew, was staying there. He and I were the youngest of the party, intent on rod, gun and bridge table, so we climbed the high hills behind the house which is now a Polish hospital and walked for miles over the heather, talking of European politics. The Silesian landowner, whose principality was given to Poland by the last Peace Treaty, attempted reassurance. He insisted that Hitler had no territorial aims outside the Reich, interpreted in its most elastic sense to include wherever Germans lived. How was it he was so ignorant? To this day I do not know. For my own last impressions of Germany—as I paused with Alan Graves in Berlin¹ on my way home from most of the Russias—was of a land and people in a frenzy of expectation. In Germany it was, I thought, the eve of the Day of Judgment, in which Hitler was to play the part of Jehovah. Certainly few imagined that England or any other country would oppose the omnipotence of his hosts.

By the time Mr. Chamberlain flew to Munich we had arrived at Thirlestane. There the Maitland family were gathered in full strength—the eldest son with his attractive wife waiting for her second baby, and the daughter Sylvia, with her husband Lord Carew and one small son. There was also a considerable house-party hoping for the best, while prepared to face the worst. Ian Lauderdale was typically practical. He made plans for war, while carrying on the multiple duties of peace. Ivy set us all to chopping down unwanted trees, which is hard work in hot weather and keeps heads occupied as well as hands. Irene Hamilton was there and Lord Tweedmouth. They were the most effective with axe and saw, for they are gardeners on an olympian scale. Elms were no more to them than Michaelmas Daisies.

When our muscles gave out, we went back—diffident and apologetic—to the castle with some improbable excuse and turned on the news. Daladier and Bonnet,² we knew, had come to London with one purpose only, and that official. It was to tell Mr. Chamberlain in the plainest words that France could not and would not fight for Czechoslovakia. This fact has never been questioned. It has constantly been published, but it cannot be too emphatically emphasized or repeated. It was the reason for the Prime Minister's meeting with Hitler at Munich. France was bound to Czechoslovakia by definite and explicit treaty. England was *not*. She had given no pledge to defend the stalwart republic, the hardest workers in Central Europe. She had, fool-

¹ About July 1938.

² French Minister for Foreign Affairs.

ishly perhaps, followed her usual custom of interfering with advice, in the form of the Runciman mission, when she knew she could not satisfactorily back her words with arms. But she betrayed no treaty, she broke no promise at Munich. That was the part of Daladier, yet he too may have been faithful to his own chaotic country, incapable of anything then but politics.

There remains the indubitable fact that when Mr. Chamberlain—an old and not very strong man, who had never flown before—got into a plane for Munich, he was serving England as well as any human being could do. He was a sincere democrat, an idealist and a Christian. He was very jealous of his own country's honour and dignity. So when—betrayed by Daladier—he went to haggle for peace not only for England, but for all Europe, equally improvident and unprepared, he did one of the bravest things known to history. It must also have been an intensely disagreeable thing. For Hitler was, I believe, atrociously rude. And it is always far easier to be heroic than to keep one's temper in the face of ignominy and insult.

It is the fashion now to abuse Mr. Chamberlain and to blather that idiotic word 'appeasement' which means as little as any other shibboleth. But I wonder if there was anyone in England who did not feel relieved when terms were arranged at Munich? At Thirlestane, it was as if a new lease of life had been signed by the Almighty. In the village, on the moors, in scholastic or industrial Edinburgh, in shops and offices, on our way south by way of the Durham and Yorkshire collieries, in factories and on farms, I heard nothing but heartfelt relief. I believe those who now talk loudest of 'appeasement' grew hoarse in September 1938 babbling ecstatically of 'peace in our time'.

We went too far—all of us—of course. We did not ask how long the new lease of life was intended to last. We wasted a year which should have been one of preparation. We knew that autumn that we had—was it one Spitfire and two Hurricanes, or the other way round?—in Britain. We knew we had neither guns nor tanks, nor the harbours of Eire, to stop Germany taking any country she wanted. So we should not have been so much—or at all—impressed by that scrap of paper signed by Hitler. By then, surely, his 'honesty' had worn threadbare. The moths of ambition and success had eaten it away. It came to pieces in the hand—like our own complacency a year later.

But do not let us underestimate the effort made by Mr. Chamberlain. That it was useless was our fault—as much as his—in the twelve months which followed. We had all—every one of us, Socialist, Nationalist, Liberal, Tory, pacifist and militarist—been warned. We would not listen. It was too much trouble to readjust the whole manner and purpose of our living. It was too uncomfortable and unpleasant to prepare for a war which we hoped, prayed and pretended need never happen. So—let us acknowledge—we did nothing whatsoever in that last year of peace to stop it happening.

Later that autumn it happened that I opened a large charity fête at Grimsby. Part of it was a bazaar in the city's biggest hall. There I spoke—with Lord Heneage, a country neighbour and a friend of my father's, in the chair, and Sir Walter Womersley, M.P., subsequently Postmaster-General, to support us both. The hall was crowded with a cross-section of Eastern County humanity. There were tradesmen and shop-assistants, clerks, railwaymen, farmers, fishermen, and so on, as well as the local squirage and a good deal of Air Force from the Lincolnshire stations. Whenever I mentioned the Prime Minister's name, the whole of that audience, representing certainly every shade of social condition and opinion, applauded till voices or gloves gave out. At the end of my speech, Sir Walter auctioned an umbrella, referred to as 'Mr. Chamberlain's', although I think it was really a duplicate which the Prime Minister had handled at his friend's request. Everybody in the enormous hall wanted to possess it. Bids rocketed. When it was knocked down to a celebrated citizen, men and women crowded to the platform to *touch* the umbrella. It was not unlike a pilgrimage in Rome, thrusting towards some holy relic.

I was staying at Morton, the house my father had built when he decided that his original place was too big. My elder brother John, a soldier in the last war, an able farmer in this one, had inherited it, but he preferred to live in a charming black and white house in Kent. My mother remained at Morton until it was commandeered by the army. Thither, along the straight Lincolnshire roads, between flat fields and cropped hedges, Alistair Gibb drove us both after the fête at Grimsby. We were so occupied putting our different ideas into speech that we nearly had a collision with an arrogant fish-truck. My delightful mother, who insists on believing the best of everyone, hoped Mussolini would stop Hitler making 'a wicked war'. I was appalled by the latest Nazi persecution of the Jews. It had happened so soon after Munich that it was like the skull and crossbones flaunted in the face of civilization. Alistair said, "I've made all my arrangements to be in the war, but I think I'll just about have time to look in at my Kenya farm first."

"You're so sure of war?" I asked.

"Well, it's got to come now—so we might as well get it over," retorted Alistair.

So thin was the crust of peace that winter! But none of us knew, apparently, with what we were to fight.

CHAPTER XV

1939

Journey for Pleasure. The Bahamas Decide My Future. I Find a Unicorn. London Dreams—and Dances

IN THE WINTER¹ I decided—after eighteen years of serious and at times dangerous travel—that it was time I embarked upon one journey for pleasure. The K.L.M.—that adventurous Dutch Line which took me to India and Burma—had invited me to go farther. The idea attracted me, but I wanted to find a unicorn. Somewhere these engaging beasts must live—but not, I thought, in the comfortable East Indies. With Columbus, surely, they would have ventured Westwards. In the new world I would find them.

When I was very small I used to stare at a picture of a naked girl riding a unicorn. It hung above a mantelpiece laden with inherited chaos. In the background there was forest. Along the edge of it—in the picture—pricked a figure dipped in coffee-gold upon a great white beast with a horn in its forehead. The girl's hair was a paler gold and wild in the wind. The unicorn's mane and tail were silken smooth, but they also trailed like a pennon in an Atlantic gale. The rider had neither reins nor spur. In the dark grass there were flowers, moon-white and pointed. They looked like candles. I thought they would be star-lit at night. It is years and years since I saw that picture. But always I have held to my intention—to find and tame a unicorn.

Everything else I have had to forgo—like other grown-up people regretfully sane. The centaurs and the fauns, embellishments of youth, departed with my nightmares and my expectations. No longer do I believe—confidently or hopefully or desperately—in any individual importance. The visions of which centaurs were a symbol have been lost. But one fairy-tale remains for me. It is centred on the unicorn. I refuse to believe that this utterly satisfactory beast is a fabrication, or that his species is extinct with those exaggerated creatures which a divine sense of humour evolved in keeping with primeval slime. There *must* be unicorns. But they could not live with a Four Years' Plan, with conscription or queues, or ration-books and coupons. They could not be regimented or industrialized, disarmed, rearmed or mechanized. Air-borne they might be, of course. They would look well in red berets—bound upon gallant adventure. But on the whole I suspect they dwell in some land simple and austere as the Old Testament where wind, colour and a timeless peace minister to their egotism. An ancient document called "*The Voyage of the Unicorn*"—a schooner

¹ January 1939.

nefariously bound upon a voyage of piracy—turned my attention to the Caribbean. There it was riveted by Colonel Thwaites and the Bahama Government Development Board. Together they invited me to spend some months in the islands where it is mostly sea and always summer. "You can write a book for us," they said.

"It will be about unicorns," I retorted. They were surprised, but still welcoming. With descriptions of Eden they encouraged me. I did not believe them. But Sir Charles Dundas, with whom I had ventured on Rhodesian platforms, was Governor in Nassau. He wanted settlers. It would not be too much to say that he collected them—with persuasion, firmness and an excellent taste.

So I travelled to the West Indies instead of the East. On New Providence I was warmly accepted. The island has passed through so many surprising vicissitudes between the age of Columbus and that of President Roosevelt that it is accustomed to miracles. It expects manna. I was a fragment of this celestial crop. For the book¹ I wrote, in friendly fashion, as a guest, good-mannered and polite—looking no farther, as is the habit of the best visitors, than was expected of me!—this book was hailed by the American press as *The Bible of the Bahamas*. The eminent *New York Times* said it had "put the islands on a world map".

This was gratifying—especially to real estate dealers and hotel-keepers. It was irritating to the wise who, loving the incomparable islands sufficiently to see their faults, would have liked the whole truth told. But this truth is not so sombre that it cannot now bear print. In a nutshell it is this. There are any number of Bahamas—but local government is concerned chiefly with the capital of Nassau, situated upon the seventeen-mile strip of New Providence. The great Out-Islands, one or two as large as Wales—San Salvador, Eleuthera, Andros, Inagua, and so on—are left to shift a deal too much for themselves. They are—generally speaking—without roads or sufficient doctoring or reasonable posts and transport. There is no agricultural instruction or assistance for primitive natives trying to farm. No regular market is assured for what they contrive to grow—in spite of ignorance, drought, gale and thin alkaline soil pocketed in coral rock. No government machinery is available to break down the growth of centuries and put back into cultivation land which in the days of slavery and the Loyalist settlers bore good crops.

The Out-Islands, which are the real Bahamas, carrying the main population with unlimited space to cultivate, are neglected and ignored by the politicians of the capital. With few exceptions, Nassavian interests are concerned with shopkeeping and land values. Agriculture means nothing to the merchants of Bay Street. They would rather import canned goods from America than encourage difficult local production. Yet the only lasting prosperity possible for the Bahamas is

¹ *A Unicorn in the Bahamas*, published in 1939.

in farming. Miracles do not last. The wild prosperities of the Caribbean—buccaneering, piracy, wrecking, gun-running and boot-legging—came and went, with hurricane force. To-day, New Providence is a link in the airways necessitated by a world war. As such she would have played a vital part had German aggression stretched to the Caribbean. But with the defeat of Germany, must pass the importance of the recent developments—impermanent as any other form of manna.

Tourists are always uncertain. When peace returns and New York to Europe means a nine hours' flight, with planes regular as suburban trains, it may be that clerks on a fortnight's holiday—as well as millionaires—will go farther afield. What then will be left to the Bahamas except their sunshine and their silken seas and the simple living which can be made—year in, year out—upon the land.

All this Sir Charles knew. He was a wise man and did not mind being unpopular among those who wanted to make fortunes in synthetic exploitation. Into my mind he put the idea of old-fashioned manorial settlement upon an Out-Island. I added the unicorn myself.

By that time I had fallen in love, but not with a man. I think it was with colour. For in the Bahamas there is a clarity of light which has the effect of wine. The seas are all imaginable shades—with crude amber on the reef below. Everything seems to be transparent. The only evil thing—apart from human egotism—is the wind. There is always a wind. But the sun does not mind. It goes on all the year, far more regular than the local clocks.

It was—most suitably—in the air that I first realized I had found the place where I must live. It was, also, in the middle of a most illogical day. Arthur and I, with Mr. Beckett, head of the West Indian Department at the Colonial Office, were supposed to meet—upon the large and mysterious isle of Andros—a certain Mr. Forsyth. He was to show us sponges—on their death-bed, as it were, for one of the sudden plagues of over-population, marine in this case, was putting an end to crowded undersea preserves. But we could not find Mr. Forsyth. Across the skies we pursued him, dropping down to land in improbable places. I grew hot and bothered. Arthur loomed large and expostulatory. Mr. Beckett remained imperturbable. He did everything that was required of him—officially and the reverse. He asked the right questions about such diverse matters as sisal and local prisoners, both somewhat wild. I had the impression that he saw through everyone—except Arthur—with the greatest ease. My husband is still a complete mystery to me, so I refuse to credit even a prominent official—and it is reported the best bridge player at the Colonial Office—with sufficient insight to solve in twelve peripatetic hours, flavoured by banana, what has bewildered me for twenty years. But I felt entirely transparent. My motives as well as my intentions were, I thought, quite clear to this restrained, reserved and decidedly engaging man. What I find so trying about this particular kind of

official is that he invariably knows so much more than he says. I am generally in the reverse position. But this does not apply to my writing—in which I exercise scrupulous caution as well as experience.

At some time during the pursuit from air to sea and reef to island of the illusive Mr. Forsyth, foster-parent to sponges, it occurred to us all that food was more necessary than further—and conflicting—information. We were then inert upon some hospitable porch. "Bananas," suggested the resourceful Mr. Beckett.

"Why bananas?" I asked. For I was already smeared and sticky.

"There won't be anything else," he said. "And it is always better to ask for what you know you will—inevitably—get."

From that moment I regarded him as a remarkable man. For I make a habit—and a burden—of asking for what it is most improbable that I shall ever receive.

Exasperated, our pilot consented to search—among unnumbered fragmentary islets—for a scrap called 'Mastic Cay'.

"How'll I know it?" he protested.

"No difficulty at all," said the helpful villagers, preparing to wind us about their persons and thus carry us out to the seaplane. "There's a mastic tree somewhere about."

"What the hell's a mastic, and what the something do you suppose it'll look like, anyway, from a thousand feet up?" exploded the harassed pilot.

Mr. Beckett offered him a banana. His mouth opened—possibly for a bigger and better expletive—but he put the banana into it, by mistake. Thereafter he felt better. So did the rest of us—after a silent and melting interval, wherein we forgot the mastic.

Eventually we found Mr. Forsyth. He showed us a cemetery of sponges. He gave us eggs. We put them into Mr. Beckett's hat and took once more to the sky. It was then, I think, late in the afternoon. I knew the exact feelings of a jelly-fish who has misjudged the tide. Arthur had become peremptory. It was not any use. For there was nothing in sight but sea and air—equally translucent. The pilot said, "We'll make Bimini some time—then you can have lunch." What an inapposite meal, I thought!

Mr. Beckett looked at the eggs in his hat as if they were his last trumps. I did not see how anyone could play them.

'Lunch' eventually consisted of pork chops, strawberries and cream—all imported from U.S.A. I hoped that our eminent companion—who had gone on 'seeing through' the most involved statements and situations—saw also the ominous portent of this meal. He looked meditative. But it may have been indigestion. The pork was tough, the strawberries frozen, the cream out of a tin.

Yet—on that uncomfortable day—looking at the prodigal flower colours strewn across the sea, I knew there would be no satisfaction for me except upon an Out-Island.

My unicorn—when I found him—would just have to put up with it.

In Nassau, that winter, I had made two friends—beside the Governor, who planned after the fashion of Cecil Rhodes. One was John Hughes, at times acting Chief Commissioner for the Out-Islands, so somewhat in the position of Moses with a multiplicity of rocks and—alas!—an inadequate rod. The other was R. T. Symonette, the most ardent creator I have ever met. There is nothing he will not create out of the most unlikely material. The one promised to find me land ruffled with palmetto, a lake, wadded hills and a beach—unlimited beach. For I had a vision of myself as an E. M. Delafield version of *Robinson Crusoe*—definitely 'provincial'. The other committed himself to building my house. It was to be set upon a sandhill, one storied, with a courtyard in the middle and Hans Andersen towers at the entrance. It was to be solid with rough, whitewashed walls, a shingled roof the colour of hazel-nuts and fir-green shutters. What could be more delectable? Everybody in Nassau said it was—also—impossible. "Don't you believe it," said R.T.

Full of hope—but prickled by doubt—I allowed myself to be taken to Eleuthera.

From Governor's Harbour we drove—a very little way. Then there was bush. Into it tramped the determined John Hughes. When his mind is made up, I cannot imagine it ever comes undone. Behind him, I panted—encouraged by several varieties of leaf-brown villagers, armed with machetes.

At frequent intervals, I stopped to pluck burrs from where my shoes ended and bare toes began. Less frequently, Mr. Hughes reassured me with the information that we were almost there. We did indeed pass a lake, but it was muddy. "That's not yours," said the Chief Commissioner. I liked to think that already I had a lake.

When we were very hot and regretting we had not brought something iced in a thermos, we came to a point with an enormous spike of cactus on the top of it. It thrust headlong into the sea. Rocks and waves were agreeably confused at its foot, and beyond there was a tremendous sweep of sand. I do not think I have ever seen such a beach. It looked as if it might go on for ever. Beside it hosts of stubbly palm trees climbed up and down the little *Solomonic hills* which quite obviously employed most of their time when it was cool in 'skipping like young lambs'.

"Come on," said the inexorable Mr. Hughes.

"But aren't we there? Isn't this it?" I asked, with complete lack of grammar.

The Chief Commissioner was already far ahead. He knew the lie of the land and everything that could be grown on it. "Here you'll have citrus trees," he shouted over his shoulder. "This'll be all right for corn and vegetables," and later, "You can plant coco-nuts in this hollow."

Already I felt I possessed not only a garden, but a farm. From the sandhills, covered with thin bush, which could easily be cleared, we came to good soil, red or black, and then to more hillocks. There was no end to these. They rolled away in tossed and wind-blown confusion with the palms which have nothing to do with coco-nuts storming over them like a deep green sea.

Once more we climbed and then I caught my breath. My heart was thumping. I did not know if it were the result of so much activity, for we had left the nominal road and it is not easy pushing through the mildest of Bahaman bush, or if it were due to the excitement which for a moment made me speechless. For we stood on top of the island, with the Atlantic pouring the richest Tyrian dyes upon the sands of Eden. I could not believe that any human being had walked upon that beach. It spread, smooth, pale, and faintly gleaming, to the boulders which closed the horizon. And these were scattered far out into the sea. Rough and dark they looked, in magnificent contrast to the shore.

When I could think of anything but the strange, aching colours of the sea, spilled in utter abandon upon the reef, I realized that on the other side of the hill, sunk between soft-breasted dunes covered with bush, there was a lake. Duck shirred the surface, or settled on it, close as lilies. Good earth rose to the ridge which is the backbone of Eleuthera.

"Well, you've got there," said Mr. Hughes, with satisfaction. He looked capable, kind and hot. His brown eyes went well, I thought, with the comfortable, happy island, conscious of so few needs and so many hopes.

"Has it a name?" I asked.

"That," said my friend, with a sweep of his arm towards the lake under the hill, "is called 'Grannie Long Pond'."

"Oh, how heavenly!" I gasped, and in the same breath, "When can I begin building my house?" For, if I could have resisted the royal purple far out where the reef gave way to Atlantic breakers, the clear blues and greens of a Perugino landscape poured into the still water nearer the shore, the inconsequent hills and the tide of palmlets, there was no more strength left in me when I heard the name of the pond. Obviously, I must live beside it, and my unicorn—when I found him—would just have to make the best of the situation.

So there, on the top of a sandhill, we sat down and longed for iced beer. For we had already walked a sufficient number of miles and our brown or near-brown islanders insisted that we must walk still more in order to reach the main road. This had not 'gone bad', which is the general—and apposite—description of Out-Island roads, but, perversely I thought, it preferred the other side of the ridge.

Somehow we returned to Nassau. There I bought a number of pencils and wasted enough paper to delight the Squander Bug—almost

as exciting an animal as my unicorn. Each sheet bore a lop-sided drawing of my house. It was supposed to be symmetrical and square, but the rooms would not balance. They grew larger and larger, in extraordinary shapes. At last R.T.—having looked at several of my drawings upside down—took charge. "I guess this is what you want—really," he suggested. It was. But I could not have been more surprised.

After that, everything became suddenly easy. Doors decided themselves. Windows agreed—on opposite walls. Other things got themselves settled—most agreeably. On a particularly hot afternoon, we went in search of red tiles for the floors of the porches, which, under Mr. Symonette's supervision, fitted easily, indeed inevitably, into the scheme of the house. When the Cuban potters assured us, in incredibly bad Spanish, that they could not make anything so red, the contractor said, "Nonsense! I'll do it myself!" Upon which, a thin, dark ghost of a youth, dripping sweat, wiped a dusty hand across his face, thereby adding a mask of grey to his shining features, and remembered he had once made a real red. "Do it again," said Mr. Symonette, "I'll give you three minutes." The tile materialized.

We found an architect, now a soldier,¹ who, in his spare time, put shape—and a great deal else that I had ignored—into my house. He drew enchanting pictures of it, with coloured roofs and grass greener than Eleuthera would ever know, sprouting about the arched porches. He drew the towers with slits of windows climbing upwards, and Mr. Symonette, refusing to be impressed by their fairy-tale effect, said firmly, "They'll do for my tanks—I've got to have height."

Gradually there emerged from the lumber-room of my imagination, the house which I had always wanted. There would be a living-room, fifty feet long, opening on to a huge porch. There would be no dining-room at all, because I have always hated the formality of meals. The Arab habit of eating wherever you happen to be at the moment is more amusing. It infuses an atmosphere of the unexpected and the adventurous into any meal. At the four corners of my solid, rough-plastered, whitewashed house, with its nut-brown roof of shingles and its heavy hurricane shutters painted green, there would be the sort of porches which you see in Spanish farms. On any of these I would dine according to the wind's pleasure, or in a corner of the big living-room, where the fireplace would be large enough to burn palm-trunks instead of logs.

Remembering Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, I decided that one whole side of the house opening into the court should be my own. There I would have all the space I could use for sleeping and writing and bathing with those gigantic sponges peculiar to Nassau, and for doing nothing at all. There also I would have an infinity of cupboards.

¹ Gerald Lacoste.

It gave me great pleasure, adding cupboards with the abandon of a Victorian dressmaker doing her worst with buttons. Most of the third side would belong to my husband and he would have a tower as well, while the fourth would be for any guests we could lure across sea or sky from New Providence and we hoped the Americas.

I planned beautiful bathrooms for such adventurers, but forgot all about the kitchen. The men of genius, architect and contractor, firmly insisted on the inclusion of such a necessity. They trimmed it with pantry and storehouses.

When everything fitted and even I could understand how to get from room to room, Mr. Symonette and I set off in the yellow wasp plane for Eleuthera. By that time I had realized why the Chief Commissioner had said, "There is only one man . . ." For whereas most Bahamans, whether native or adopted, suggest that watches and calendars are not only unnecessary but ineffective as the Treaty of Versailles, this particular contractor is positively Churchillian in his determination to get things done as he wants and when he wants.

Just as we were starting, a priest telephoned to ask if we would take a parcel to Governor's Harbour. The telephone made strange noises. I could not hear what he said. I thought I caught the word 'altar-rail'. "How big is it?" I asked nervously.

"It would cost about fourpence to send by post, but I daren't risk its being late."

"Of course we'll take it," I said. So on my last journey that year to the adventurous isle, I carried—beside all the paraphernalia of everyday life, food, pencils, sun-glasses, a compass and patterns of building materials—a small, sealed box. It contained the holy wafers for communion on Easter Sunday.

As we landed in Governor's Harbour, I saw the usual group waiting. It was a composition in charcoal, slightly smudged. For the car was incomplete and the waiting islanders leaned upon each other and what was left of the machine. With a warmth due to old friends, they welcomed us, pouring out plans for what they were going to do for my house and on my land. The feudal system evidently appealed to them. Blacks and browns, or rich, warm, berry-coloured, they did not want unions. They did not want to be organized. "I guess you'll be a godsend, ma'am. We'll all work for you and then we can eat. Every one of us will be happy."

A child, with stiff pigtailed flaring from her head, stood a little way apart and stared at something she held. While eight people were struggling to fit into the Ford's three seats, she smiled at me and held out her treasure. It was a perfect little Seahorse with a horn on his forehead.

"I'll give it to you," she said. Her white teeth split the darkness of her skin. She looked like a fruit and she smelt of seaweed and earth. Quickly, generously, she thrust the creature into my hand. Its back

had the fantastic curves of the beast I had seen so long ago in a German picture. It held its neck as stiffly. Instead of a mane there were spines, but the horn flared proudly as if ready for a fabulous combat. So, at last, I held in my hand, on Eleuthera, a unicorn of the sea.

"When will you settle down and stay in one place?" ask the city-dwellers. "When the soles of my feet stop itching," answers the Bedouin of the great deserts. . . .

In that last spring of peace, with summer promising fulfilment—in a floodtide of flowers and fruits with strange, sharp names—I thought I had reached the end of all my journeys. I believed my feet would wander quietly through the bush and over the little hills which I would turn into farms. I thought, after working on the land all day—in the sun—persuading it to production, I would walk in the evening upon my own miles and miles of beach. There, while the sea ruffled in, spun crystal upon mother-of-pearl, I would step lightly, so that five hundred years of peace should be undisturbed. The only marks upon those sands should be made by the hoofs of my unicorn. It was a delightful dream.

It broke when Nazi armies marched into Prague. Then I knew there could be no peace. My 'fabulous great beast', feared by mediaeval Jesuit priests who believed also—very wisely—in dragons, witchcraft and 'demons in men's shape', would need his horn as a weapon.

Back I went to England. For a little while, London still dreamed and danced.

The grandest balls were given to celebrate—it seemed to me—the end of a world.

Holland House opened its doors—to the King and Queen—when Sonia Cubitt's daughter came out. The Marlboroughs shared with their friends a spectacular night at Blenheim. The 'Johnny' Dewars gave a wonderful dance at Dutton Homestall—the gardens glittering like a conference of glow-worms and fire-flies in Brazil—for Kathleen's daughter, now married to Michael Astor. At Shelagh Westminster's party for Queen Ena of Spain, one of the Infantas played the piano so seductively that we all danced out our feet to her music. I remember waltzing for a long time with Terry Bective, now Lord Headfort. He is the right height and very mobile. So was Hansel Pless, with whom I also danced, but he was preoccupied and sombre. I remember the dress I wore. It was the last wasp-waisted extravagance of that desolate and gay season. It had been made by the irresistible Russian 'Lucie'. Her genius—at Mayfair Couture in Queen Street—was responsible for the legend crediting me with looks which I never possessed. It was a lovely dress—unbelievable silk muslin, yards and yards of it, voluminous as a peony head and printed with birds in every clashing colour, yellow, blue, green, orange, violet, red. It must have been outrageously gay. I knew how I looked in it. Briefly, I was

happy. But it was not the happiness of Elcuthera where it is always 'the morning and the evening of the first day'—when God looked upon His work and knew it good.

CHAPTER XVI

1939

Waiting for Armageddon in Tunisia

IN THE SUMMER OF 1939 we went to Tunisia. Remembering Hitler's intimate knowledge of Europe—drawn from Dr. Haushofer's files—I hoped he would be too intelligent to make war. Obviously he could get everything Germany needed without a pitched battle. My husband had been appointed head of one of those missions to neutral countries which never materialized, because the Governments in question were too frightened of Nazi criticism to receive them. He felt he would be at the end of a War Office wire. But he came for a short—and perhaps a last—holiday because, in spite of his Celtic temperament, he always refuses to be apprehensive. We had taken an Arab house at Hammamet. It belonged to Sybil Temple, once the wife of William Bolitho, whose *Twelve Against the Gods* tells with great effect of humans with the temperament of hurricanes.

I craved for the sun. After so long in the Bahamas I felt like a shrivelled husk in the cold and greyness of England. The appeal of the Caribbean is largely spiritual because of the freshly washed, early morning feeling due to the clarity of colouring. The spell of Africa is physical. It is a wound which never heals. For years, indeed, throughout my youth, I had been obsessed by the desert and the life it bred. It would be interesting to see whether Africa had the same appeal for middle age.

All across France we heard men and women talking as if war were impossible. The richer people, industrialists, shopkeepers, landowners, resolutely refused to believe that Hitler would attack Poland. His attitude, they said, was a political manoeuvre. On the whole, they disliked Italy more than Germany. Their feelings were wholly selfish. Poland was far away and the Mediterranean their own particular concern. Mussolini's colonial demands were disconcerting and unreasonable. Our chance acquaintances were divided between alarm at the Duce's evident intention to get Tunisia and their inherited distrust of perfidious Albion's imperial ambitions. We came to the conclusion that our Allies understood us even less than our enemies.

Artisans and labourers pinned their entire faith to Russia. They knew we had no army and they were not interested in the sea. But

Russia, they insisted, would refuse to allow Germany to break up Poland.

A guard on the south-bound train became eloquent on the subject. "You will see," he prophesied, "the Soviet will come in with us. *Mon Dieu*—what a man, that Stalin! He will never give way to Hitler. He hates the Nazis. Next week, to-morrow perhaps, you will read of an alliance which will overwhelm Germany. While Russia stands beside us there can be no war." From Calais to Marseilles and right across North Africa the workers of France put their faith in the Soviet.

We crossed the Mediterranean on an Italian boat. It was punctual, clean, comfortable, and every minute was organized. Passengers got up, ate, played games, rested, listened to music, did everything except go to bed as if they were attached to a clock. The captain was very hospitable. He entertained us with delicious sparkling wine and told us how sorry he was for England, in spite of her folly over sanctions. When he heard that a relation of mine had fought with Garibaldi, his friendliness increased: He felt it was a great pity we pinned our faith to France. "She will never fight. She is too disorganized. The Duce has her measure. There is nothing in France but politics. We are well rid of those in Italy." He was a pleasant, simple, sunburned man of peasant stock. He supported Fascism because it had improved living conditions, developed his country on modern lines, put an end to unemployment and made him feel the citizen of a great nation. "Britain should be allied with Germany and us," he said. He drew a long breath. "Together we could arrange the world." Had he been a German, he would have said 'rule it'.

I was still convinced that France would fight to the last man for her own soil, although I realized she would hate going to war for anything else. When I told the young merchant captain, "You cannot judge the French till you try fighting them on their own fields and farms—then you will find them undefeatable," the sailor looked at me with a child's wonder. It was as if he thought how *could* the grown-ups be so blind. "But it is not a nation at all," he said. "All that—it is finished."

In the middle of a very hot afternoon we landed in Tunis. For the second time in my life I was disappointed with the town. It is very like Toulouse or Marseilles, except for the bored and rather unhealthy looking Arabs in burnous or kaftan. There are palms, of course, and dusty flowers in the squares. The cafés sprawl on to the pavement. The shadows are so clear-cut, they appear as barriers between blinding expanses of light. There are arcades and cheap, crowded shops. The restaurants are poor, and the medley of races, Berber, Latin, Jew, Armenian and bastard Arab, have lost a good deal of distinction by the mixture of their blood. The human *soufflé* is much the same in character throughout the Mediterranean.

Tunis looked tired in the late July heat. Paint and plaster peeled from the walls. Strips hung down like the tongues of thirsty dogs. Men of all races, shabby whatever their clothes, leaned on their own spines or against the nearest lamp-post to read the afternoon papers. They were more interested in the bourse and the complicated political speeches than in the imminence of war. While *la Russie* negotiated alliance with *le peuple*—their own people—all was well. There was no need to bother about anything except one's pension. One must naturally avoid action of any kind. Thus there could be no possibility of mistakes. For amusement there was *toujours la politique*.

After prolonged negotiations and the signing of enough papers to secure a change of nationality, we succeeded in hiring a car. It was old, and its tyres 'doubtful' only by courtesy. We piled our luggage inside and—with caution—drove out of the town. Cap Bon peninsula stretched away left of the comparatively good highway. Its hills did not look at all formidable. They were gentle and stained with long lilac shadows. Goats and dark-fleeced sheep were pastured on their slopes.

As we drove the forty miles to Hammamet, we saw the highway as the connection between all manner of people. French officers, well mounted, stopped to talk, with familiar interest, to Arab cultivators and peasants. A negro soldier sat in a village café with his wife, a fair-haired French girl, unpainted, pretty in her striped blue cotton. Berbers walking in from the hills stopped official cars and asked for a lift. It was never refused. There was no difference in social standing between the Arab on his donkey, with a bundle of chickens hanging from his tea-tray saddle, and the French merchant at the wheel of his own car. Tirailleurs from the Midi, in dusty uniforms, were on the best terms with wayside garagistes or boothkeepers, coffee-brown under their shabby fez, grape-purple if they came from hotter Mauretania. In her colonies France has achieved a familiar understanding with the native races, mixing blood and ideas as well as language. The solution is not particularly stimulating, but it has soothed the pangs of nationalism. Jew, Arab, Levantine, Latin, get on sufficiently well to forget race in favour of family and a savings account. Thrift is more important than anything except politics. The town workers are socialist, with an eye to what they get from the State. Their pockets and their digestions are as important as their love-affairs. Food, family life and the daughters' dot measure the emotions of the bourgeois, with papa's *petite amie*—her rights recognized—in the background.

The country-folk, with clearer characteristics, for the Berber blood is still comparatively pure, are conservative. What the townsman demands of the Government, the farmer prays from God. If he is French, he asks for good seasons and good roads, for his daughter's suitable marriage, for the end of a boundary dispute, the change of an unpopular official or his convenient blindness. If Arab, he wants increase of an

already large family. He wants more beasts, less taxation and as little work as will provide him with food, coffee and tobacco, silver spurs, if he owns a horse, embroidered clothing to impress his fellow villagers, and a pile of frilled pillows for his marriage bed. France has been eminently successful in adapting the mentality of her officials and her colonists to the essential qualities of Tunisia. Poor, lazy, comparatively content, grumbling about the weather and the cost of living, but expecting no more than they get, the country-folk forget what language they are talking. Their interests are the same.

Hammamet is an example of French tolerance. It also represents the universality of Tunisia. Between the two wadis which enclose a mile or so of beach, smooth, glaring white but too soft to provide pleasant walking, a colony of leisured migrants have built houses to satisfy their own ingenious imaginations. The men are of several different races, American and European; the most famous lives as a millionaire. His fabulous palace might have been created by Haroun al Raschid—with slave-labour—on the banks of the Tigris.

In this forlorn, beautiful, oppressive and over-emphatic settlement, everything is exaggerated. Emotions, physical, spiritual and aesthetic, charge the atmosphere. Loneliness and self-satisfaction are as perceptible as the prickly grass separating sand and gardens. The houses are defiantly individual. None owes anything to the others. With high, blind walls and thickets of trees, they shut themselves away, preserving, intact and secret, their miseries, or their enjoyments. But on the beach, during the hour or two between late rising and the midday meal, there is an excess of speech. Quarrels have gale force. Astounding things are said—and forgiven. The extravagance of the various passions are only equalled by their short duration. The ordinary individual is aghast at the accusations made, but the commonplace is not encouraged between the wadis of Hammamet. Women are regarded with distrust. Human combinations change with surprising violence. Everyone feels far too much and talks even more. Somebody is always in despair. Warnings are common as thunder-clouds at the end of the summer. Altogether there is as much hysteria as in the Victorian girls' school of fiction.

In the very middle of this ridiculous and childish assertive colony, intent only on their own distorted reactions, a completely delightful British couple had chosen to settle because they liked the sun and living was cheap. They must have had a sense of adventure, for they had built a most attractive house round three sides of a swimming-pool. The rooms opened right on to the water as if it were a garden. Their conversation, frank, sensible, interesting, showed that they had been together for years, and that each found resources in the other which made them indifferent to their peculiar neighbours and independent of the world. For some obscure reason they had not been married. But that August preceding the war they decided on a wedding, and com-

bined it with a party at which Consular Britain and official France first set foot between the wadis of Hammamet.

Outside this half-moon oasis, where each of the ten or twelve houses—original, beautiful, fantastic—was deeply embedded in a garden representing genius and also devotion because of the lack of water, there were other kinds of people. The editor of a Tunisian daily, with a ravishing wife who always looked cool and as if she had just stepped out of the laundry-basket, lived up the sandy hill by which we left the highroad.

There was an Arab village, once a fortress, crumpled between immensities of wall, its base in the sea, which lived by fishing and also, I fear, by submitting to the extravagances of the foreign colony. There were French business men who drove in and out of Tunis each day and whose houses had that curious, overcrowded simplicity which no other land achieves.

There were big farms, fenced with cactus, their spines strong and sharp as darning-needles, and there was always a flow of leisurely traffic, persistent as the tides, along the highroad—donkeys, camels, top-heavy yellow buses, soldiers on foot and on horseback, old men with their beards dyed green to show they had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, youths in bright kaftans, dirty and torn, with flowers behind their ears, veiled women and sticky children, their eyes set in flies.

Time did not exist. Watches went wrong. The sun and hunger provided the day's measurements.

Our house was probably the smallest on the beach. I found it exciting and satisfactory. It was very much like a tall, white box. The door, bright green, was covered with a cuirass of nails. The windows on the outside were slits narrowed against the sun, behind heavy grilles. The garden was full of low, cushiony flowers. Zinnias blazed like fierce fires, and out of them rose trees with big leaves. The leaves were not friendly. They clattered in the late summer storms. They were dark and swollen, with lots of insects underneath them. The roofs of the house were all at different levels, so that from the most unexpected places, you could walk out on to a flat space and find mattresses and a view of the hills. Square, block steps and outdoor passages, with seats cut in the walls, led from one roof to another. The life of the house turned inwards, for every room looked into the court. There was a little pool in the middle, where two fat pigeons drank. An arched loggia ran round three sides, and the fourth was occupied by the largest fig-tree I have ever seen. The kitchen opened directly on to it, so while we read or drank coffee, or tried to sleep, under the branches, we could hear Ahmed and Mohamed discussing us with a shrewd appreciation of our failings which was instructive. They were the two servants who went with the house. They had enormous charm. Their smiles had the sudden splendour of lightning. They were, in turn, motherly, hysterical, outraged, spendthrift, pars-

monious, nervously hard-working, lazy, sullen, persecuted and expansively friendly. They were always hospitable. The atmosphere they created was theatrical, but if the crisis were sufficiently grave—such as the pump going wrong or the stove exploding—they rose to it with conscious magnificence. Mohamed was a superb cook when his temperament permitted. But he had to be allowed a free hand with sauces and the weekly accounts.

I loved the house. Its combination of secrecy and space, for the court was relatively small and the roofs so cleverly arranged as to seem enormous, satisfied all my requirements. I could shut myself up, inviolate, or stare over the green oasis to the hills which looked rough and untrodden. But I did not like Hammamet. I did not really like the scraps of Africa which I saw in Tunisia. They seemed to me synthetic. There is very little character left in the coastal plain. Even Kairouan, with its famous Mosque of Swords, is open to the infidel. Hammamet depressed me to the pitch of folly. There was nowhere to walk. I could not stride over the country in thick shoes and comfort, for it was all either deep sand turning into glutinous clay when it rained and streams rushed down the wadis, or speared cactus, or land cut into squares for vineyard and olive grove. I could not walk on the beach because it was heavily defended against 'Italian invasion' by barbed wire. Every ditch hid an armed post. The long grass provided cover for old-fashioned guns. The black Sudanese troops were magnificent. In each battalion there was a cadre of Frenchmen living exactly as the natives, sharing the same beds, food and washing facilities—in this case, the sea. All these men were ready to take on Hitler or Mussolini and the worst they could send. They wanted to fight. They were interested in war. It was their business. But their arms and training were obsolete. Campaigns against dissident tribes had limited their experience. Their minds were still full of the 'great war'. They had no conception of the war which Hitler intended to make and which he had described to me at Berchtesgaden. The blacks were brave, cheerful, brutal, friendly, terrified of ghosts and as good as any colonial troops I have seen. They did not mind death. They liked music, food and women. They adored getting drunk. They were not at all smart, but they looked effective and proud of themselves. Apart from these cheerful animal creatures bouncing about in the sea—just the colour of porpoises—when they were not eating strips of under-cooked flesh with their fingers, seated round a communal pot, knives their only implements, I found Hammamet depressing. It shut down on me like the lid of a very beautiful box. I felt old and without a future. Only the house was comforting. Like all Arab houses, it took possession of one and turned one into a belonging. Arthur and I used to sit on a different roof each evening, and look at the green depths of the trees from which the hills rose, curiously fragile, or at the lead-coloured sea with the sky drooping

heavily over it. We drank quinquina and other uninspiring French aperitifs, and I decided that Africa—this Africa, over-civilized or decadent, or deadly materialistic like the young bastard Arabs with their insistence on money and their stomachs—was for the young. I thought you must be sure of years and years of struggle and faith in front of you to be able to endure the different forms of defeat represented by Hammamet.

CHAPTER XVII

1939

'Enemies' and 'Allies'—German, Italian and French North Africa

PEOPLE CAME TO STAY WITH US. A young M.P. called Everard Gates who, a few weeks later, became an Ack-Ack gunner, drove his wife Stella and her small son, Christopher, across France in one of those enormously long cars which seem to go on for ever. As soon as they reached Africa they secured another car, filled it with delectable food—result of a well-organized raid on the Tunis market—and arrived at Hammamet full of enthusiasm. Mohamed welcomed them with equal delight. He adored the lavishness their supplies ensured. We had the most remarkable dishes for dinner. Stella is always so warmly welcoming to places as well as people that she is a perpetual delight. But next morning the sea provided the first shock. It was early, long before the young men, godlike and deep bronze, and the middle-aged men, simpering and conscious of curves, walked in pairs upon the beach. So there was nobody to warn us. It was a very still day—no wind and the water like sheet metal. Stella insisted on wearing one of the enormous local hats, big as a cart-wheel. Under it, she walked into the sea. I flung myself in, swimming with that exalted satisfaction given by buoyant salt water and no bathing-dress. It was short-lived. Soft, impalpable substances drifted against my body. They touched, felt, clung, slowly detached themselves like dissolving flesh. Others came and sucked with ghost lips, cold and hardly palpable. Before we could get away our skins were burning. Salt and acid seemed to be rubbed into the pores. We waved and shouted to Christopher not to come in. He thought we had gone mad.

The "Portuguese men-of-war", which in calm weather infest the sea, drifted nearer the shore. Then we could all see our submarine enemies. There were hosts of them, shaped like gourds, slightly opaque, with filmy transparent tentacles splayed behind them. Thereafter we used to conduct 'mine-sweeping' operations, with nets on long

poles, before bathing. But however many jelly-fish we raked out of the sea—and Christopher became an expert, cupping the blancmange creatures in his hands, under their backs and holding them upside down so that they could not sting—more always drifted in. Only on stormy days, with the waves thick and dull as the clouds, could we swim without being stung. Fortunately the British couple—he a retired naval officer—made us free of their pool. And one night, with the moon conniving, they gave a heavenly party—to celebrate their wedding. It was as unreal as our ideas of celestial bliss, but everybody enjoyed themselves with that eleventh hour feeling that dare not count minutes for fear they should be the last. By this time Ursula Hohenlohe, a twenty-eight-year-old German, had joined us, straight from Berlin. We introduced her at once to the Italian Consul and they quarrelled unceasingly. "Princess," said the Fascist official, "why did you not wait to visit Tunisia until it was an Italian colony?" "Because I wanted to see the place before I died," retorted Ursula. Never have Allies disliked each other more, but we flung them together—determined they should do their worst for their countries and to each other.

While they bickered, the German aristocrat—born a von Seidlitz and therefore not to be confused with the fabulous "Stephanie", and the proletarian Fascist, reared to bluster, I sat on the edge of the pool with Graham Eyres-Monsell. In it the moon and Arab marriage lanterns were reflected. Beyond it the gardeners, forgetting their ordered occupation, danced as wild things let loose. Behind me the British Consul, my soldier husband and our sailor host were talking about facts. They knew Mussolini thought of himself as heir to the Caesars. His vanity and his colonial ambitions were equally dangerous, but would he be mad enough to risk conflict with a great naval power? Italy's length of coastline made her vulnerable as a land-crab out of its shell. With the measured understatements of our race, these three men talked, putting their faith in the qualities of their different services, but finding no need to express such certainties.

The French editor was delivering himself of a masterly rhetorical exposition. It was, as so often among his countrymen, too logical to be practical. But not till much later would his enthralled audience realize this defect. Two *petits bourgeois* had their heads close together. They looked serious and concerned. "What do you think they are talking about?" asked a very pretty American tourist who expressed her appreciation of Tunis by saying she could "just eat it". The Roumanian at her elbow retorted, "It is always one of two things—taken *au grand sérieux* like that—a woman or a *very small* sum of money."

Graham had just come back from America where he had been studying industrial psychology. He said that if America could be convinced of 'world-shrinkage' due to air-power, she would fight, but she did

not want to be 'let in' for another foreign war to make matters worse than before. At present, she thought England had better fight, or stop talking about it. In spite of her brilliant foreign correspondents, who had seen for themselves and tried hard to make the U.S.A. see too, nobody west of the Atlantic could quite believe in Hitler. He was preposterous and a nuisance, but, regarded from three thousand miles away across the moat of an ocean, he had done a lot for his country and you couldn't blame him for trying to clean up the mess made at Versailles and Trianon. While Graham explained the young American's cultural convictions—"war is the antithesis of civilization"—a neighbouring voice, gay, strident, transatlantic, repeated, "Wilson didn't get any change out of your Lloyd George at the last Peace Conference. You turned down all the things he wanted for Europe. You made Hitler—I'll say it's up to you to put him in his place."

Graham looked at me with serious eyes. He was then in quest of conditions which maybe a hundred years of peace and few, if any, frontiers and hourly air communications and a common language may evolve. "There's nothing I don't like in the States except their ideas of us—and those must, surely, be our fault," he said.

The French editor, socialist and—with limitations—man of affairs, was saying, "Russia will decide. No European power can challenge her size, her strength or her convictions. She alone could survive a totalitarian war. It would take four or five generations to restore any smaller nation taking part. But Russia has unlimited resources, human and spiritual as well as material."

It is like looking from one room into another, from a laboratory into an attic stuffed with lumber, to remember the conversations of 1939.

The British Consul said, "There is no gap in the French Maginot complex except the Belgian frontier. But not a soul thinks of that. In their minds, the forts continue to the Channel. Soldiers, mind you, will talk with Maginot certainty of Maginot invulnerability, and in the same breath of politicians haggling over the price of fortifications never built. It is so often like that with the French. They know more than we do. They acknowledge less. They grapple with nothing except their private affairs, to which they bring a genius wasted in public life."

Such seriousness, such sense and insight were out of keeping with the night. Strong drink was distributed by Arabs in their native dress, but unusually washed and mended. Supper came on trays. We ate it, sitting on cushions with feet hanging over the edge of the pool. Ursula slipped down beside me with that lovely, all-in-a-piece movement emphasizing the grace of her body and the elasticity of trained muscles. She was good to look upon and strong as the German youth movement could produce. She was passionately anti-Nazi and unwilling to acknowledge it because she loved Germany and was thankful for the new life Hitler had given it. Bewildered, she used to say, "I suppose it doesn't really matter, it oughtn't to matter if we, as a class and as

individuals, are poor and persecuted or oppressed and circumscribed, if Germany herself is healed. The Führer really has improved conditions so much for the workers. There is employment now and food and self-respect for everyone." "What about the Jews?" I would ask, and Ursula would become passionate, stupid and incoherent. It is extraordinary how completely amoral the most ordinary and kindly Germans became when confronted with their anti-Semitism. They can *not* be tolerant where Israel is concerned. But that night—with the hands of the clock creeping between war and peace, with life and love and breath suspended as it were between the impossible and the inevitable, Ursula exclaimed, "The Italians are unreliable! All of them! What a fantasy it is to talk of friendship between us. We hate each other. They are afraid of us and we despise them. It is our curse that we Germans can never fight on the side of the countries we respect. Sita! Tell me, why are we so cursed? What have we done that we can't have the allies we *want*?" She was heart-rending, like a fair, young German staying with the celebrated Mr. Sebastian, a Roumanian who elegantly entertained the world and himself. The Teuton lad showed me a photograph of his wife in her teens. "I love her very much," he exclaimed. "I have to. I hope we shall have many children so that I can love them too. For the rest of the world hates us. Why do you dislike us so much? It is terrible to go about, knowing everybody you meet hates you."

He was a Bavarian peasant speaking only his own language, and Ursula the most hedonistic cosmopolitan I have ever met, but Hitler had destroyed in them both the thing they most needed. For Germans have a craving to be liked that no Britisher can possibly understand. At the same time they do everything conceivable—many things beyond ordinary human conception—to make liking impossible.

Lovely, dark-skinned, warm-voiced, with a pomegranate-coloured mouth and enormous sad eyes, Ursula complained, "Let's go home and sleep and forget there ever was an Italian. Camels are so much nicer—I saw one just now in the lane. He snored at me and blew bubbles."

The camel was still folded up neatly under a cactus hedge when we shuffled along our lane on the way to bed, yawning. We held reality at arm's length and refused to be drawn back, with the dawn, into the pattern of events which we knew the day would weave.

Mohamed woke us with the news that the Bey of Tunis, kinsman and predecessor of the pro-Axis ruler whom General Giraud deposed after the Allied victory, had ordered all men between the ages of fourteen and forty to offer their services to France. "There is much anger in the village. Naturally! That sees itself!" he concluded. Expert in extracting the utmost emotional significance from the most commonplace incident, he was entranced with such an opportunity. "A man begins at sixteen—at fourteen if he has already begotten—and he does

not end when his beard's fullness shows the ripening of wisdom. We are all men! We shall all fight with France." The subtle compliment was unconscious. That 'with France' instead of 'for' her emphasized the link, so close that the two ends of it were confused.

That night, Sebastian the Roumanian invited us all to dinner. Graham told me it would be a psychological event. I disbelieved him. For, having seen much wonder and much beauty—of man's making and of God's creation—all over the earth, I felt a lack in myself, more than in what our host had invented as a refuge from himself. There was not in me any more, I thought, the power to be overwhelmed with that spontaneous and always fresh delight in beauty which is the privilege of youth.

So, in unsuitable high heels, intrigued but not expectant, I plodded along the lane with Stella Gates looking so exactly right that it is impossible to compare her with anything else and Ursula—a potential storm in satin the colour of grey pearls. We came to a huge red door. It was arched and the top lost in shadow. There was an overpowering scent of fruit and syringas. The walls towered up to meet a heavy sky. Stars winked and flickered like very old eyes sunk in grey flesh. The door opened. Between lemon groves we followed a road. Flowering bushes thickened the dusk. In the distance a great white building—the perfection of shape—loomed over the sea. The setting of terraces had been carefully considered, so that the design should in no way detract from the significance of the house. But it was not a house as we understand the word. It was a succession of mighty but balanced spaces, austere, empty and dead-white, caught between tall arches. The roofs and walls were unimportant. The arches held the attention and took one smoothly from one expanse of floor to the next. For no reason, but eternally—it seemed—in that particular place, there were huge white couches very square and covered with white sheepskins. Beside them enormous shallow bowls, whiter than alabaster, held the heads of white flowers. These stood on the unending whiteness of the floor. It may have been marble. I do not know. For my eyes were caught and held—as was intended—by the innumerable candle-flames. I had never realized the beauty of fire until I saw it as the only colour in the world. Huge white tapers held in sconces, hundreds of them, were so arranged that they exaggerated every perspective. There was no wind. Like desert lilies, more alive than anything living, they rose straight and ardent against the arches.

There was no visible end to the rooms, nor any exact division. There were a few very beautiful objects, I think, placed in not too obvious positions. There was a deep, still pool, darkness itself yet reflecting the colonnade which surrounded it. For the African moon gave the night some quality of day. A dark brightness emphasized the proportions of everything.

I remember Arabs in white burnouses, in which their faces looked

impassive and withdrawn. There were a great number of these servitors, and they handed us colourless flowers heaped on trays. The men staying in the house took handfuls of them to smell, and all through the evening they held the most perfumed to their nostrils and looked at each other over the petals. They wore white woollen robes, the hoods thrown back. Sebastian wore the same loose garment, and on him it had dignity. Cultured and complex he might be, but he was certainly at ease in his African cloak. It fitted him like an old habit, and he wore it as easily as an ascetic his hair shirt.

We dined beside the pool. The women were placed beside their own husbands and nowhere near their host. The food was exquisite and unusual, the wines superlative. Arab servants, moving soundlessly on bare feet, offered them as if they were a prayer: The talk was escapist. It mattered not at all, but it was pungent as the breakers of scent which rolled in from the garden. The men screamed and giggled at each other's wit. Rivalries provoked shafts of intelligent malice. Only Sebastian remained natural and unmoved by the theatrical atmosphere he had, with such pains, created. Behind him, through the succession of arches, gleamed the still spears of light that were the candle-flames. Beside him they were reflected in the dark water. I was fascinated by these sharp, finely shaped flames, and I watched them—imagining a phalanx of lancers mounting invisible stairs—while Sebastian talked, with a combination of perception and intuition, of men and women in two hemispheres. At some period of his life he had married an American—and loved her. But nobody knew if he regretted her. He did not speak of himself or anything he felt. While his guests argued about their respective merits, as artist, musician or collector, he watched them as if from a great distance, and when he was tired of the flowers he held, laid them down with a gesture of renunciation and talked of Savonarola. A curious man and a dangerous, I thought; one conscious of his defeats but not likely to make the common mistake of confusing price with value.

Among the ordinary guests who had motored from Tunis was a French officer who was delighted by Ursula. He told her she was the only civilized woman he had met in the colonies. He said, "Your country and mine should really be friends, for—between us—we have every quality." Ursula, pale, with deep shadows under her eyes, spoke like a sybil. She had been much moved by the evening, for she worshipped beauty, especially if it was unusual. In French, the most expressive of languages, she said, "You have no country. For twenty years there has been no true France. You are ghosts who have inherited a great culture. You will still, I suppose, excite our admiration and our envy. For you will teach us the art of living. That is your genius. You realize the importance and the interdependence of love and cooking and words—what miracles of words!—what you feel and what you think. But yes, you know how to live. We others are

barbarians beside you. *Enfin*, you are practical. You know that patriotism is spiritual snobbism—*pas autre chose*. You are too civilized. You have learned too much about life, like the old Greeks. *C'est cela*. France will play the part of Greece conquered by a modern Rome in the guise, I suppose, of Germany. But you will still have a great influence, for none of us can forget, none of us can hope to equal your exploitation of living."

"Ursula," said my husband sternly, "you are talking too much."

"Arthur!" mourned our impetuous friend. "Why did you not stop me before? After two in the morning, if I have drunk sufficiently, I always talk. But sometimes, perhaps, I am not as brilliant as I think."

We walked home by the sea, our high heels sinking into the sand. Ursula took off her shoes. Holding up her twilight coloured dress, she danced along—on slim, strong feet—within the wash of the waves. "*Elle est épatante cette femme là!*" exclaimed the French officer. "What energy! What line!" Determined to see her again, he invited us all to dine in Tunis. We went two nights later, and stopped to drink vermuth at the house of the Italian Consul. He met us on the doorstep. "Signora—there will be no war. Russia has made a pact with Germany."

CHAPTER XVIII

1939

*An American says, "There will be no day after to-morrow."
Tunisia, France and England*

IN SILENCE WE STARED AT HIM. Arthur went deep red. "It's impossible," he said. The Fascist official, who had once confided to me that when Italy ruled Tunisia the Arabs would be 'kicked' into their proper place, repeated, "Europe is saved. There will be no war."

Upon this I became intensely—and disagreeably—British. "It won't make the slightest difference. How could it? We shall fight at once—if Hitler invades Poland—and we shall go on fighting, alone if necessary." At that moment I was so angry and so hurt that I would have enjoyed charging German guns with the equivalent of a toy sword—as the Polish cavalry did a few weeks later.

Only Ursula was unmoved. "It was inevitable," she said. "Didn't you notice? The Führer has been preparing us for this in Germany. Months ago, we knew it would happen. The High Command were determined not to fight on two fronts." She spoke in a level voice. Politics in her country were subservient to national need.

We all dined on the terrace of a restaurant with a view of the harbour.



Detroit Times U.S.A.

Above Rosita Forbes surrounded by Girl Guides at the Cooke School, Detroit, U.S.A., after a lecture in 1932

Below A visit to Western Command Battle School, where "realistic and toughening-up training as near to actual warfare as possible" was given

CONTRAST IN TEN YEARS

British Official





Above In the South-Eastern Command with Lady Carlisle (Liaison between the A T S and the Army)

Below With General Sir Bernard Paget, C-in-C Home Forces
COLONEL McGRATH—1941 AND 1943

British Official photos



Below us Tunis spread like a prayer-carpet. The threads were still bright. Avenues lined with palms were brilliantly lit and cafés crowded. It was impossible to go to bed. We were all overwrought, and nobody said what he or she thought. Only the Fascist Consul, misunderstanding the situation, was happy because Poland—a country he had never seen—would be destroyed and there would be no need for Italy to fight.

Very late we found ourselves drinking Arab coffee in a house with the intricacies of a jewel-box. It belonged to a French merchant, but I have no recollection of him. Perhaps he was not there. The officer who admired Ursula took us up a steep hill, across a quilted garden and into a court so small that it suggested a setting in precious metal. The gem it held was a fountain by Benvenuto Cellini.

From this court we went—breathless and somewhat stupefied—into several others, each the size of the proverbial pocket handkerchief, so that we felt clumsy and overgrown. In one there were fantastic birds in gilt cages, in another a fig-tree, in a third an arbour covered with passion flowers. In all the ceramics were worthy of a museum. Between these small secret courts, passages glowing with old tiles, their roofs painted and gilt, led from one amazement to another. For each room was a masterpiece. I forgot myself and my sorrow and the imminence of war. The house which had not a single window looking out over the town, held the history of Arab Africa. In it the centuries were confused, and the result—in silk and metal, stone and porcelain—was beauty unbearably intimate and a trifle perverse. For Arab art has inherited—from Persia, Byzantium and Babylonia, even from learned Chinese travellers—much that it does not understand. Sated with colour, bewildered by complications of design, I set out to look for a way on to the roof. After losing myself many times, I found at last the low door, by which in olden days the women of a rich merchant's harem must have gone in twilight or starlight to walk unobserved above the town. There was the usual Arab multiplication of levels, so that one stepped continuously up or down, with a different view at the top or the bottom of each stair. From that height, it seemed as if one looked into a number of stacked boxes without lids. For Arab Tunis sleeps through the long, hot afternoons. At night everyone sits out where the breeze is coolest—sits and talks and drinks coffee. There is one word in Arabic for the whole, long-drawn-out proceeding—*fadh*. As I stood on the top of the unbelievable house, so strange and rich that it reminded me of the undersea coral gardens in the Caribbean, I saw the life of Tunis spread out on terraces and roofs. Two old men sat on the nearest, like eagles on a ledge of rock. They were grey-bearded with splendid turbans. A beaked coffee-pot stood between them. One held a cheap paper fan. I could see the colours of the old silk carpet hung on the wall behind them, and the bolsters against which they leaned, but they could not see me behind

the women's parapet. The old men talking earnestly, a group of students with their books, some women huddled round a hearth, solemn children eating locusts dipped in honey, other old men smoking water-pipes, an *alim*¹ bent over a manuscript—all these, brilliantly lit by the moon, were dominated by a battery of French guns. They were immediately in front of the house. They did not look as if they would ever see action. There was about them the deliberately toy effect of the most modern Noah's Ark.

While I wondered how Tunis would defend herself, for her people, if they could divorce their intentions from their politics, would, I thought, prove much more effective than the tools provided by a distraught Government in Paris, my husband called from one of the toy courts, "It's late—we must go. Where's Ursula?" She was nowhere apparent. So most of us set out to look for her. After some time we heard angry voices. As usual the German was disagreeing with the Italian. This time the dispute seemed more serious than usual. Suddenly Ursula appeared round the corner of a roof. Obviously shaken, with her cheek bleeding, she stumbled towards us. For a ridiculous second I imagined the unsuitable partners had come to blows, but an anxious voice came from a higher level, "Principessa, have you hurt yourself? Why would you not let me help you?"

"Help!" snorted Ursula, and then with the plaintiveness of a misused child, "Oh, Sita! I caught my heel and fell off one of these silly roofs. Look what a mess I am." Out of mysterious hidden cupboards, the French officer produced unguents. They were in long phials, gold-painted and slender as pencils. We soothed and swabbed and anointed Ursula. We put her firmly into our car—lest she should extend her enmity from Italy to France—and drove back to Hammamet.

After that, ordinary life took charge of us. For war, I think, is very much part of ordinary life. It is, perhaps, not the antithesis but the essence of civilization, for it brings out the predominant qualities in all of us. If civilization is an accomplishment of men and not only measured in terms of mechanization, it must stand the test of war. Nations can rot like over-ripe fruit. Knickerbocker was right when he told young America, which in 1939 had been trained for twenty years to regard death as the worst that could happen, "In Central Europe I have seen many things much worse than death."

With such thoughts we waited for a telegram from the War Office. It came early one morning. An hour later Rosie Kerr arrived from London, chiefly by plane. We welcomed her with dismay, but she did not mind. "I'll get a job at the British Consulate. If there's war they are sure to need help there." Leaving her to settle her own problems, for the Kerr family, experienced in Balkan revolutions, must be used to dealing with the unexpected and the disastrous, we concentrated on Ursula. Or tried to do so, for when we would have thrust

¹ A religiously learned man.

her into the keeping of the Fascist Consulate, everybody concerned expressed such loathing each of the other that we were obliged to connive at her taking the last outgoing civilian plane.

Weeks later, I received a letter from Switzerland. "My country is in the hands of a madman. There is no future for me." In other words, the neutral diplomatist *en poste* in Holland, with whom she had been considering marriage, had proved his caution rather than his passion.

Before leaving—that same evening—for Bizerta, we took our latest visitor to see Sebastian. Rosie fitted into the scene better than the rest of us. A year later, in the blitz on London, she returned to her flat after a night's work among the hurt and homeless, to find the whole building gone. A young man whom we all knew and liked, for he was utterly charming, Ronald Balfour, offered to drive her out to some relation in the country. He was exhausted after fire-fighting every night at the end of his ordinary's day's work. On the broad Kingston by-pass he went to sleep and drove straight into one of those hefty pyramids directing a roundway. He never knew he had done it. Rosie herself never knew what had happened. She recovered consciousness—one eye down her cheek and only half a face left—suspended in an electric cradle, with a strange voice saying, "We don't know her name. The man she was with was killed and she's cut to pieces. We daren't touch her yet to see the extent of the damage." To be put together again and given a new appearance—as attractive as the old—must have been torture, but the girl stood it and reduced it to its correct proportions, incidental rather than eventful. That quality of instinctive endurance was always obvious in her, even when she sat on dull white bolsters, heaped against Sebastian's white walls. She enjoyed everything with her mind and her body, without my own great defect of distortion by over-emphasis. It must be wonderful to be able to expect and appreciate and suffer if necessary without exaggeration. Rosie set us talking about Greece, for her father, the Admiral, had been instrumental in rescuing the Greek royal family from diverse disasters, and I remember Sebastian saying, "That country is the most unhappy in Europe, for one cannot live on heroism and an unsaleable tobacco crop." He must have been feeling malicious, for he added with disconcerting honesty, "For Roumania it is different. My country is the darling of your Foreign Office. We have our oil, and as no one of the great powers will allow another to possess it, we shall always—I think—have our oil."

When I asked him how much else Roumania would have at the end of a war between Western Europe and the Dictatorships, he shrugged his shoulders under the white woollen burnous, and with an elegant gesture—as a woman flirting with her fan—held a white flower to his nostrils. "Do not let us speak of war," he begged, "it is so little elegant. Let us talk of poetry instead." We left him sitting among

his cushions, backed by the fantastic house he had built, with wild, rough grass—not a garden—sweeping down to a deserted Qubba, the tomb of a saint, and then the sea.

We left Rosie with the British couple, already planning in terms of hospitals and battles—the latter first, for there was not a bandage in the place. That night they would attempt a black-out, but the moon—even the African stars—would turn the white houses of Hammamet into targets. Nobody knew when Italy would attack. Everybody was certain that she would. "When she feels safe," said the French editor with bitterness.

We reached Bizerta early the next morning, driving across the sandy causeway between the salt-pans so often described during Alexander's campaign against von Arnim. The harbour was empty except for two scarred, grey naval craft and a few cargo tramps. After a long wait, we crossed to Marseilles on the last civilian boat. It was crowded with French holiday-makers, soldiers, officials recalled or returning from leave, with Jews afraid of enemy raids on the open African cities, with a curious flotsam of dark-skinned polyglots which is always to be found in the Mediterranean fleeing from one national tragedy to another. I was given a magnificently decorated cabin, very dirty, and I slept in the bath, shaped like a coffin, because bugs made free of the bed.

All across France we travelled with soldiers going to join their regiments. I do not think we ever had a conversation—and we talked or rather were talked to all the time—that did not end with the Maginot Line. By it the average Frenchman felt the foresight of his government, and indeed his own patriotism, was justified. On it he pinned his conviction that the war would not be serious. There was no enthusiasm, but neither was there much grumbling. It was a dull job and a stupid one, this war, but there you were—and this time the Germans couldn't get into France. At every station loud-speakers brayed instructions to the mass of soldiers crowding in and out of trains. There was no food. Disorganization was evident, but the poilus were friendly. To my husband they said, "One will meet each other, *hein*, in Berlin, is it not so?"

I was appalled and dared not say so. For eight years I had seen Germany—year by year—grow to inhuman strength. I had seen her men trained, her machines mass created for war. The German people did not want war, but they were never in their thoughts divorced from it. With its possibility, with the probable need of it in their hearts and heads, they lived, loved, ate, slept and performed every simplest action. It became their main interest, the fundamental commerce of their country, the reason for everything they did. For many of them it was also a nightmare as it never was for us because we did not believe in it. Germany did.

France had gone on making money by devious means and having

nothing to show for it except the dots of unborn daughters, making love and paying too much attention to the mistresses of politicians, 'making' wine and good cooking and, of course, politics—the latter so furiously inept that the whole scheme of French living came to pieces like loose knitting at the first tug.

I suppose I thought of these things as I watched France's soldiers, cheerful enough but unkempt, with none of the pride and the self-assurance which I had attributed to the finest army in Europe, bulwark of a great nation.

In England it was worse—and also better. So far as I can remember, there were *no soldiers rushing for trains*, so one could imagine mobilization as effective as it was complete. There were already refugees—rich Americans hurrying out of France. They crowded our carriage and—being tired, uncomfortable, harassed and already portentous about the war—they were not very amiable to us. They blamed us for the mess they were in. Imperturbable railway employees fed us all impartially and without any hurry. They worked out fractional sums to change francs and dollars into sterling. They behaved as if nothing unexpected had happened, and the Americans were exasperated. One nice youth said to us, "Don't you people realize you are *for it*?" At Victoria he insisted on looking after us, as if we were already on the scaffold. I liked him very much and asked him to lunch 'the day after to-morrow'. "Oh, Lord," he said. "You English! There won't *be* a day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIX

1939 to 1940

England Declares War. Bombers and U-boats in the Irish Channel. To Canada—With Some Difficulty

AS A MATTER OF FACT there was. I woke up in my apricot-coloured bed with the huge silvered palm-leaf reaching up to the ceiling behind me. My maid propped the usual breakfast-tray on my knees after drawing my new satin curtains which exactly matched the walls and carpet. My sister said I had told the painter, "Oh, it's quite an easy colour—you know the inside of an oyster-shell or the underneath of a very young mushroom."

At intervals all round the big room rose the pillars of smoky glass. The wall on my left was built of grey glass as if it had been bricks. So that morning, with the sun shining, it held the reflections of the old, reddish houses opposite. I shall never own a room like that again, so I might as well remember—with pleasure and without regret—its arti-

ficial beauty and its unnecessary but very comforting luxury. Into it, before I had finished breakfast, came my husband. He looked rather white and stiff, but he smiled as if it all did not matter. He said, "Well, the balloon's gone up. Hitler's invaded Poland."

I felt sick. I remember even now, five years later, exactly what I felt. Pity, first—for all the ordinary people in Europe who would be obliterated like ants—and relief—relief that at last England could justify all her long speeches. Then there was physical misery—and fear, I suppose—for I had no illusions. I knew the strength and intentions of Hitler. He had been quite open about them. Much of England would be destroyed, and with it the life to which I had been brought up. There would be another England, better perhaps for many, but everything we had made would come to an end. Beauty, I thought, would go, and a great number of qualities unacknowledged by reformers. But England would once more be great, and I longed for her rehabilitation among the nations of the world. I had seen her much honoured—as when, long ago, a Rhodesian innkeeper said to me, "I always take a British cheque, sometimes an American one, never any other." For twenty years and more I had watched her lose the incomparable position won for her by the Victorians. It is the habit to blame politicians and diplomatists for lack of policy, for fear of action, for compromises between commerce and conscience. But the change in Europe's opinion of Britain was also due to the behaviour of private individuals, whose word had proved brittle and whose cheques were waste paper. I thought of an English duke being run out of Berlin by the police, while I said to myself, "Well, for us—it is finished," and was rather glad because it would not be necessary to think of oneself any more. It would be enough to think about a job—ambulance-driving, censorship, information? Such talents as I had were unsuitable. I do not suppose I felt all this consciously at the moment because I was too obsessed by the fate of Poland and the obligations of England, but it must have been somewhere in my mind.

"Are we at war?" I asked hopefully. And the cold, heavy feeling spread inside me. "Not yet," said my husband, "but we will be." "How soon?" I asked. "I can't bear it, if it isn't to-day."

The next months were awful. I knew Poland. I loved and admired the Poles. Friends of mine were killed in that desperate defence of Warsaw with nothing at all. Others deliberately got themselves killed bombing German airfields without enough petrol to get back. I read of Polish rejoicing when first England, then France declared war—the only countries, surely, in all these four years to do so before they were attacked. And every day, breathless with suspense, hurt and probably hysterical because I felt the war in my own flesh and spirit, I searched the papers for news of our bombs falling on Germany. There were only leaflets. So many of us felt the same, but that did not help Poland. Nor could we help equally heroic Finland, later on in that

horrible frustrated winter. All we could do was to pray that America would interfere as she had hoped that we would do on behalf of Czechoslovakia. We did give our furs and linen. There were few English, I think, who at that time would not have gone themselves, or at least sent guns instead of warm clothing and bandages.

Peggy Grippenberg, vivid, gay, kind, with a heart adaptable as a caravan, had long been a friend of mine. I had met her first in South America when her tall, attractive husband was at the Finnish Legation in Buenos Aires. I thought then that she shared with Lady Willingdon that genius which is a matter of taking infinite trouble. In 1939 the Grippenbergs represented their country in London, and everyone liked them. They were so brave and so heart-broken. "Is salvation within the bounds of possibility?" asked Peggy in desperation, when enemy armies were breaching the Mannerheim line. Sweden had refused passage to foreign troops. Nobody could get to Finland, let alone fight in a climate that only a few out of the many Scandinavian volunteers could endure. I remember hoping that Russia, whose people I had liked and admired since my first journey in the Soviet Union, would stop when she got Karelia, a province largely Slav by blood and tradition. I told Peggy, "I am quite sure the ordinary Russian soldiers thought they would be welcome in Finland. Even Stalin may have believed it would be a 'token' war. When I was last on that frontier, the peasants on both sides thought it artificial."

A day or two later Peggy telephoned, "There is no chloroform in Finland. I must send some at once. How can I get enough?" I passed her tragic plea to Sir John Kennedy, and the Red Cross coped—as usual—with the urgency of the need. Chloroform went to the patriots of small, desperate Finland fighting—not so much an enemy power as a phase of evolution. For the Treaties of 1919 had created and re-created impossibly small nations incapable of feeding or keeping, let alone defending themselves. Perhaps the next conference, preferring reason to emotion, may federalize the Balkans and the Baltic. Peace will then be more probable.

During the autumn of 1939 my husband waited for his Mission to materialize. When it was quite certain that it would *not*, he was appointed head of another—nearer England. That plan was also frustrated. Eventually the War Office sent him to tell our troops what they would be up against in the German army. His job may have had a less expressive official interpretation, but what he really did was to travel from Scapa Flow to Belfast, and so on, forcing into the minds of men still obsessed by 1914-18, how and for what we had seen Germany preparing during the last ten years. He got pneumonia in Ireland, just as the mission which he should have led began its three weeks' existence. Hitler in those days left no time for eleventh-hour strategy. His enemies were defeated by their own dilatoriness before his planes massacred their civilians.

Meanwhile I had failed completely to be any use at all. During the autumn of 1939 I applied for every kind of job—even 'emptying waste-paper baskets in Arabic'—which needed languages and knowledge of foreign countries. But ministries evidently preferred more malleable material. I expect they thought me alarmingly well known and feared an unconventional effect on their files. During those disillusioning months when I discovered the disadvantages of experience, I was reminded of my first contact with the Foreign Office. It was probably in 1920 or 1921. I had just returned from Arabia, full of information, for it is impossible to deny that even Emirs and Sheikhs, not to mention dictators, whether of commerce or of countries, *do* talk more openly to their own chosen guests, especially when young and easy to look at, than to the official representatives of suspected interests. I saw a charming old man called Sir John Tilley, who, according to Lord Tyrrell, then Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, was subsequently found wandering in search of habitual support, murmuring, "Oh dear, oh dear! What *shall* I do? There's a girl in my room and she *will* tell me all the things she ought *not* to know."

Towards the end of 1939 I was invited to go to Canada to speak for the National Council of Education, whose originator, Major Ney, had done much good work on both sides of the Atlantic. So far the war had meant to me the bitterest personal frustration, for all I had been able to do was to write articles about the Empire and our probable fronts (North Africa and the Middle East) in the *Fortnightly*, *Illustrated*, and R. J. Minney's excellent *War Weekly*, which died a year or two later of paper starvation.

We had moved from our enormous house in Great Cumberland Place and were established in the most engaging bandbox in Chapel Street. We had two small maids, and they explained with amusing earnestness that they could not expect the wages to which they had been accustomed because they would, in effect, be a glut on the market until the war was over. It is odd to remember such ideas now.

Except for the black-out, which made me feel as if I were living under an eiderdown, there was little to make ordinary stay-at-home people realize the magnitude of the war, or indeed that there was any war at all. The surprising emphasis laid on the necessity of amusing our troops in France, the appeals for implements of sport from golf-clubs to playing-cards, made me doubt our national sanity. I wondered, at times, if I had dreamed those months in Germany when youth and middle-aged drilled as a matter of course, when the factories belched out munitions of war, and we laughed at the Teuton genius for synthetic substitutes.

My articles became more and more serious in their tone, and R. J. Minney, a keen socialist, begged me not to take so realistic a view of enemy resources. How amusing it is now to look back upon what we considered 'alarmist' in 1939. It could not reach the fringe of

Hitler's least achievements, nor begin to foreshadow the barbarities from which Europe would suffer.

I remember an argument with Prince Pless, half German, half English, just before I sailed. He said, "This war is a case of the elephant and the whale. You remember the old fable. They challenged each other to mortal combat. All the beasts of the earth gathered to watch so momentous an event. Dominion was at stake! But nothing happened because the antagonists could not get at each other. The whale could not fight on land, nor the elephant on the sea. There you have the case of Britain and Germany." I looked at the tall, still young ex-Uhlan, whose English mother and German wife were in Nazi hands. "Hitler will never move West," insisted Hansel Pless. "He will hold the Siegfried Line until the Allies are tired of the war. It will be stalemate—you will see."

I wondered if he really thought it. He must have known Germany very well. He travelled back and forth between Poland, of which since the Treaty of Versailles, his principality had been an oppressed and unhappy part, the Reich and France. His occupation was, I think, the selling of Polish beer, but he liked the company of politicians and—in White's Club—of men whose interests were very different from his own. I used to wonder about Hansel with his pathetically divided loyalties, his charm, his passion for science, and his—to me—unnatural insistence that he wanted to live in England on nothing a year.

On January 13th my boat was supposed to sail from Liverpool. It was one of the Duchess liners—enormous it seems to me now after the small cargo tramps on which I subsequently crossed the Atlantic. Everybody was nervous when the captain got his sailing orders on such an 'unlucky' date, and relieved because we were held up in the Mersey for twenty-four hours. Those were the days of the magnetic mine, and all sorts of fearful stories were told about it. We were only a handful of passengers in the first class, with a number of Balkan emigrants, whose nationality nobody knew, on the lower decks. When the river bar was opened, we went straight out, full speed into the usual winter fog, I thought it terrifying, especially as the captain and the first engineer were said to have 'different ideas'. All the evening the fog thickened. We were safe from submarines, but mines did not need sight. Apparently we did, for suddenly, with the engines all out to get away from the danger zone as quickly as possible and be off round the north coast of Ireland before dawn, there was a long, disintegrating grind. I was sitting alone in the reading-room. It was very comfortable, with an electric fire blazing and lots of light. The heavy brocade curtains emphasized the predominant shade in the expensive upholstery. I had been feeling pleasantly relaxed, as if I had had a hot bath and been put away on a shelf out of reach. A voyage generally gives me this impression, for the business of life is suspended and one sits back, at ease, between two phases of activity.

The grind and a quick succession of jars shook the whole liner. The engines went into reverse. Something definitely rent. Then there was peace—no sound at all. The engines had stopped. And there we were, stuck on something. It turned out afterwards to be South Rock, County Down. I believe they emptied the water-tanks and, in the morning, with the tide, we drifted off. The passengers had been told to stand by, with their lifebelts, but I went to sleep—fitfully it must be confessed—for I am a bad swimmer and I thought if I had to be drowned, it would be less uncomfortable and definitely quicker in bed. A lifeboat, I thought, would be difficult to achieve in the fog. It would also be cold and I would be dreadfully seasick. I suppose really I trusted to that old promise, "She will always be protected", which was made nearly twenty years ago in the Libyan desert and which has influenced my life more than anything else.¹

By breakfast-time next morning we were afloat again, with a keel, I am told, like corrugated roofing after a hurricane, and crawling cautiously for an Irish harbour. When we got to one—why should I not say it was Belfast, since it was so long ago—the fog lifted and we felt the low green hills washed with violet were personal friends. Somebody said, "We'll have to go into dock. They'll never let us cross the Atlantic like this," and I was dismayed. I hate going back. The inevitable false starts of my caravans in Africa and Asia—the time lost, the tempers fretted by delay—were always a source of unreasonable misery. But back we had to go. Minute, sturdy tugs attended us. They looked like squat, brown water-beetles flung about by the waves. The master of one had shouted up to us, "Do you want an escort? We'll see you over."

I could imagine the enormous liner snorting. Even the passengers were amused. They were also tired, for they had sat up all night. Half-way across the Channel, at 11 a.m., just as I was taking off my fur coat and heavy shoes—which the stewardess had advised as the right things to be rescued in—the warning bells rang. The siren brayed, "Submarine sighted." This, I thought, is too much. We've had quite enough happen to us already. But how meticulous one was on a first war voyage! I had put my money and passport in the pocket of my mink coat. Everything else I valued was hung about me, altering my shape. I remember I even had face-cream and food tablets in case we remained adrift for days. The stewardess knocked at my door, imperturbable and imperative. Unhurried, and very effectively loaded—rugs, whisky, jewellery, bandages and chocolate—the passengers gathered in the main saloon. It was deliciously and frivolously rose-coloured.

There were two or three commercial travellers, an airman going to an administrative job in Canada with his wife and daughter, a scientist and an important financier who disturbed us all by telling us that a

¹ See *Gypsy in the Sun*.

fortune-teller had predicted he would be on three different boats, one with oars, before he reached Canada.

By this time there was a good deal of noise outside—orders, life-boats being lowered (they were already swung out and ready on the davits) and our gun firing from the stern. It was comparatively rough and we were interested because a middle-aged man continued to be seasick. The scientist was specially intrigued. "Pardon me, sir," he said to the recumbent figure, "but do you really feel ill? I thought it was all a question of imagination and that the—er—nausea would be completely dissipated by fear."

"Possibly," retorted the sufferer, "but it happens I am not at all afraid."

Into the saloon poured a number of wild, hopeless creatures. They all had a lot of hair. The women wept. The men gesticulated. Dark, hollow and terrified—perhaps already at their wits' end as a result of what they had suffered in Central or Eastern Europe—they looked as if they were even now in the tumbrils, their destination certain. The Englishmen patted them clumsily and offered strong drink out of flasks. The women looked awkward and murmured, "Nothing's going to happen. Do *tell* them it's all right—nothing will happen."

Everybody looked at me. "Don't you know *any* language they can understand?"

"No," I said, but I tried one or two of those we learnt at school, naturally without effect.

The Czechs or Slavs, or perhaps they were Armenians, or Jews from Roumania, did not even listen. My credit dwindled. There was nothing left of it.

How could I have travelled in Africa and Arabia if I didn't even know Magyar!

"You are just like Bond Street," said the airman's daughter kindly. "I adore that fur hood. Where did you get it?"

We talked clothes—and I was afraid. I like being *on* a horse and beside the sea. I don't really like the reverse—in either case.

Bombers arrived—in those days ours of course. Equally of course, I went out to see what was happening. It was my first taste of war, and exciting, but one felt like a caterpillar pinned to a board, completely helpless.

Our gunners were enjoying themselves immensely. The bombers signalled—with lights—"Stop firing." Our enthusiastic amateurs paid no attention. They were *not* going to let anyone else get their submarine. The bombers dived so low I thought they would go, nose first, into the waves, and dropped depth-charges. The explosions sounded as if handfuls of chains had been thrown against the ship's hull.

Our siren blared again. A very pretty woman who had also come out—contrary to orders—counted rapidly and compared the result with

the printed list of instructions. "That must be 'abandon ship'," she said, doubtful. "Nonsense, why should we? We haven't been hit."

The bombers were wheeling down like gulls. They must have been in some danger for nothing would stop our gunners. The usual rumours sped, "The submarine has surfaced—the other side—you can't see her here," and then, "They've hit her—the conning-tower went right over."

We stood beside the lifeboats. There was a slight list, but it would have been easy to get into them. And we were so few, we should have had space to spare, lots of it. There could have been no danger. But the dim, dark, incomprehensible men and women continued to sob, and it was exceedingly cold. Beside me, the small lift-boy shivered. He wore sky-blue with wonderfully polished buttons and his hands were a dull lilac. So was his nose. I offered him the blanket I had brought up with me. Shocked, he refused. "Not in uniform, Miss," he said.

That is all I can remember of my first encounter with an enemy submarine. Our gunners were sure they had sunk it. The bombers said we were too dangerous and went away, but not until it was certain we could make port. The tough little tugs saw us in. Then—as a parting shot—they signalled, "So long, big 'un. Let us know when you want another spot of protection."

A week later we all started off again on another Duchess boat, equally large and newly decorated. She was a lovely ship, but she rolled to beat the porpoises. I don't recollect being ill, but I must have felt it. We had no escort or convoy. Away we went, on our own, trusting to our speed to evade submarines. I remember little about that voyage except that the passengers off the first Duchess behaved with the self-satisfaction of veterans. I expect we were intolerable. It was very rough, and one day at lunch-time a wave stove in some port-holes near the dining-saloon. I must say the crash was a good deal louder than anything I had heard at sea. Water rushed across the floor between the tables. There were not many passengers, but with admirable co-ordination of movement and purpose those there were rose, seized their lifebelts from neighbouring chairs, and went quickly upstairs. Seventeen remained to continue their meal, conscious of superiority. They had all been on the other Duchess.

Except for the weather, which did its worst, nothing happened to us, although we were dismayed to find the important financier on board. "Are you *sure* your fortune-teller didn't mean the landing tender when she mentioned a third boat?" I asked him, hopefully. "No," he replied, rather proud of the way fate had singled him out for misfortune. "It's got to have oars. She said so."

Without mishap, we docked alongside a Canadian wharf, and the important financier said he was delighted. But I think he felt reduced in stature.

CHAPTER XX

1940

War Speeches in Canada. False Security. New York is Interested—and Perturbed

I HAD NOT BEEN TO CANADA—except for a few hours to lecture in some big city just across the U.S.A. border—for about twenty years. Then I had been unmarried and full of confidence. With another girl, equally undismayed by official restrictions, I had wandered round the world, mostly off the map, borrowing what we needed in the way of horses, the floor of a native hut as a bed, the pirogue of the Indo-Chinese customs or the New Guinea Government yacht. In return I think we must have given a good deal of entertainment, for amused officials told us—while still engaged in looking for everything we had lost—"there is never a dull moment after you two arrive in port". *The Times*, reviewing my first book, said we had asked for everything we wanted with the assurance of well-bred children who had never been refused. For a whole year nobody was ever unkind to us. On the contrary, they helped us to do the most preposterous things, like going across China, by junk and sedan-chair, between the armies of the first war-lords. We had no troubles at all, and our only difficulty was to stretch our exiguous means, particularly strained by the purchase of porcelain in Peking and furs in Korea, to reach that moment, delectable to us and surprising to him, when Lord Richard Nevill, representing Government House, met us in Ottawa. By that time we had only two complete garments left. One was a frilled muslin and the other mayoral red velvet. We had to stay in bed alternately for there was never an occasion on which both could suitably be worn.

On that first never-to-be-forgotten journey through Canada, we had walked into the Rockies, dragging after us a ridiculous pack-pony misnamed Butterfly. We had slept in the forest rangers' huts, on beds of pine-branches, and on one occasion were carried across a river in flood by a stray rider who—to our amazement and complete lack of understanding—appeared to be carnivorous. We discussed his habits with some concern, but the sight of an enormous porcupine half-way up a tree, where he looked like a swarm of bees, put the problem out of our minds.

Of this Canada seen just after the last war, I kept the happiest memories. Friendships made then lasted through the decades of peace. I was delighted to think I would again see Mount Baker from the golf-course at Victoria on Vancouver Island. Out of the American coastline, in the evening, it floats like an enormous pink water-lily

resting on the sea. I wanted to be sure the copper roofs of Ottawa's state buildings were as like the Kremlin as I had decided when I first saw the Red Square in Moscow. I looked forward to seeing the forests and the lakes, the sturdy farms where in my teens I had so enjoyed myself, and above all I wanted to learn what had happened to the host of people who had been amazed and amused at me so long ago.

In fact I saw very little of anything except trains, crowds and a diversity of platforms.

Generally speaking, Canada in February, 1940, was concerned with the war as a form of evolution and as a symbol of patriotism, but I doubt if anyone had the least idea of the forces which the Dominion had set herself, so generously, to oppose. I got my first shock in the great port of Halifax, where newspapermen, editors as well as reporters, interviewing me at breakfast between cornflakes and waffles, confided their own opinion that the war was a bluff. It wouldn't go on. It couldn't. There would be some sort of compromise.

The intellectuals, interested in Russia and influenced by her attitude, saw no clear issue. Those whose individual links with Britain were closest were already concerned with all kinds of help from enlistment to food-growing for overseas. Any appeal from our islands met with whole-hearted response. But Canada's reaction to the deadliest danger in world history was still individual. According to their own character and traditions, industrialists and farmers, artisans, clerks, lumberjacks, river barges, fishermen and so on, looked upon the war.

In Halifax the landsmen were still in the stage so well known in Europe. Hitler had no ambitions in the West, they said. Russia would limit the damage he could do in the East. The whole thing was 'phoney' and it could never affect the Americas.

Hot and bothered, I used to explain to men and women living on the edge of the Atlantic that from the first moment, the war at sea had never been 'phoney'. I described the days I had spent in Liverpool waiting for a boat. I told how our destroyers went out to meet a hidden enemy with little except courage. In those days there was such a need of ships, that elderly men who had been retired for years were commanding extemporary naval craft. Often they had to get their ships out of harbour without a pilot, and the Mersey approaches showed some of the results. There was not enough of anything to equip the ships which had to be provided. From blankets to doctors they went short. But that did not stop them putting to sea.

On the other side of England the fishermen in places like Yarmouth and Grimsby were out for German mines instead of herrings. I was speaking one day in a Lincolnshire port when the Mayor asked for volunteers. It was still early in the morning. A hundred men were needed. Before noon ten times that number had offered their services. There were grey-beards tough as leather and lads who looked weedy

but could stand up to the North Sea at its worst. They came just as they were, in their rough woollen jerseys, with a rag or a dishcloth round their necks, mostly without coats. Some of them left their dinners untasted. Their wives ran after them with pails of food. They were ordinary fishermen, told by their political prophets for twenty years that there could never be another war, but they went out at a moment's notice to net magnetic mines instead of the cities' breakfast kippers.

For the navy and the merchant seamen holding open supply routes which now—after more than five years of unrelenting struggle—stretch over 100,000 miles, the war was never 'phoney'. It was always *à outrance*—fought to the death, under the sea and on it, against the best armed and the most ruthless enemy civilization has known. And it was fought by men who had no rest or respite, who could hope for none in their ceaseless watch on which the life of England depended.

These things I used to tell in the Canadian Maritime Provinces, and hard-thinking men who did not know much of Europe, but had read a lot in the endless winter evenings, snow-bound and shut away from other occupations, nodded perhaps and said, "This isn't a sea war. It'll have to be settled on land, and that's where the German people will break."

Mr. Chamberlain was still saying, in effect, "We are not at war with the German nation," and as I went westwards through Canada, speaking all the time, the newspapers used to publish in two columns side by side my reiterated warning that National Socialism had united Germany behind Hitler, and the British Prime Minister's conviction—founded perhaps on the delighted welcome he had received in the Reich—that Nazism represented only a small part of the country it controlled and oppressed.

From coast to coast in the premier Dominion I found myself battling against the general belief that Germany 'would break up inside'. Second only in popularity was the idea that our blockade would starve the Reich into quick submission.

An election was pending. Canada was tremendously anxious to help win the war—if any particular effort was necessary for that purpose, of which she was not at all convinced—but she was still more interested in the immediate political issues. Both sides used the war as a stalking-horse, for each thought, no doubt, they were most suited to direct and increase the country's already considerable effort.

It was a pity, perhaps, that I visited the premier Dominion at a time when, very naturally, the first concern was whether that brilliant politician, Mr. Mackenzie King, whom French-speaking Canada considers the best Prime Minister of all time, should be returned to office, or a Conservative take his place. The war—then sufficiently remote and on land particularly uninteresting, with the added complication of the Soviet Union, symbolic to youth, being on the wrong side—faded

into comparative insignificance beside the election. I say 'comparative' because, individually, the Dominion was offering the best it had.

In one of the first towns where I spent a night in an hotel bed, instead of on yet another train, the red-capped porter carrying my bag told me he had just completed his years at the University and was filling up time till he could get into the army.

A farmer pushed up to the platform after my speech, shook my hand warmly and said his eldest son was already training to be a pilot, and he had another 'coming on' who would be 'in time for the finish'. He'd go himself only he couldn't depend on his inside since a Hun had put a bayonet through him at Vimy.

The pressman who photographed me while I breakfasted, hurriedly, with my suitcase still unpacked, told me he was "down for the Flying Corps". He added that he liked seeing as much as possible and thought the air would do him fine. He then talked about the King and Queen with whom he had travelled. That was as much part of the daily ritual as saying good morning or good night. For if there was one thing in which the whole Dominion was even more interested than in the election, it was—still—the royal visit. I doubt if a single house was without some informal snapshot of their Majesties. The Queen had become a legend. The Madonna of Lourdes was not more idolized than this small, stalwart Scottish girl who has so splendidly—but never lightly—borne the burden of a crown. It is difficult to describe the feeling with which she inspired the most reserved and inexpressive people. I remember a business man, shrewd, unresponsive and, I thought, rather intolerant, who had been persuaded by a fellow Rotarian in a small town to go down late at night to the railway-station where the royal train would halt for a few minutes. In a puzzled voice, choosing his words with difficulty, he told me, "I saw the Queen through the window. She looked out at us and smiled, and each of us thought she looked straight at us. There, I am getting all muddled already—and the truth is I can't explain the effect she had on us. We were all plain men and we hadn't a cent's worth of make-believe between us, and it wasn't only that she was beautiful—we knew that—it wasn't her colouring or her kindness, it was a whole lot more. She might have been an angel, she was so different to anyone else we'd ever seen." Very seriously, he added, "She must be a mighty good woman, for she looks straight out of heaven. Anyway, that's as near as I can get it."

From east to west in Canada I heard much the same thing. That any woman could travel for weeks, at such speed and under such pressure, without making one single mistake, is sufficiently amazing. I have spent a good deal of my life among crowds and I know how unutterably tiring it is—even if there is nothing but generous applause and a mass of friendly faces pressing round for a closer view. Often I have felt I should quite quietly disintegrate like a chemical solution,

and after hours, days, weeks when there have been crowds all the time—questions, handshakes, autographs, parties, people and more people—I have been afraid of every word coming out of my own mouth! But the Queen retained an enchanting calm, whatever she may have felt.

"I was with her a great deal and only once did I see her push back a loose hair. That was one of the loveliest things about her. She always looked perfect and never bothered about it." This was a woman's verdict. The men's was generally, "She took such trouble. We liked her for that."

It seems to me, having travelled the length and a good deal of the breadth of Canada since the war, that no appreciation of that great country, so strangely composed of caution and courage, common sense, friendliness, diffidence, generosity, introspection, endurance and suspicion, can possibly be complete without an exact understanding of the inspiration afforded by the King and Queen's visit. Within an hour of landing those two people had made certain the effect they subsequently achieved. The result of their work—the result of the happiness and content they showed, and possibly even the delightful way they treated each other, for Canada, with Kipling, adores the human touch—has been a new interpretation of imperialism throughout the premier Dominion. It has probably also caused French-speaking Quebec province to redirect her royalist sympathies, pledged to the customs and culture of *le Roi Soleil*.

For me French-speaking Canada centred on Montreal. I spoke at a famous University on a still, cold night with the snow several feet deep. It was incredibly beautiful under the great trees, their branches bent under the weight of snow. I do not think I had ever seen so much before. The street lamps seemed to me like suns. The contrast with London's black-out was as arresting as the silence of the snow-muffled traffic. Out of the enormous hall I came to find a crowd packed on each side of the drive. They wanted, I think, to see more of 'somebody from England', rather than me. I had spoken very earnestly about the war—as more than just the heroic venture of a generation. I had tried to show it as the struggle between two opposing creeds, fundamental as that waged by Judea's apostles. To me, already it was more than a war for land, or natural resources, for oil, minerals, or the rectification of frontiers distorted at Versailles and Trianon. It was the inevitable battle between principles so fundamentally divergent that to it a century might justifiably be sacrificed. Something of this I must have contrived to convey to the keenly receptive and always generous Montreal audience, for the crowd followed me into the street and the nearest people asked pertinent questions, so that, for some time, in high-heeled gilt slippers, fur coat and hood, I stood in the snow trying to answer them.

Right across Canada the same thing happened so far as the people were concerned. Nearly always they wanted to hear the truth about

Europe. They listened with the utmost attention. They asked much that I could not answer. They did not always believe what I told of Germany's strength and unity. Desperately, some of the older women used to say, "We hoped you would tell us it would be all over by Easter," and, "You can't be right—Germany went to pieces in 1918. She'll do so again before next winter," and, "She has no sea-power. Her petrol won't last a year. She hasn't enough to attempt an offensive. Why, she dare hardly risk an air raid across the Channel, she's so short of oil."

Looking back now, I have the feeling that—for all those weeks, speaking sometimes five or six times a day as I became better known owing to the interest of the press and the exaggerated recommendations that went on ahead of me from one city to another—I fought with desperation for what I believed to be reason and truth. But truth is not the same for all of us, and there is no reason why any one person should be interested in, or convinced by another's truth. For twenty years and more, diplomacy has put expediency before truth and the peoples of the earth have become accustomed to evade facts. Politics colour our truth and our own limitations distort it. But more and more, I believe, the war, with its necessary sufferings and hardships, is rousing a desire for truth. It is, after all, what we are fighting for, so why should we be afraid of it? I once heard a radio commentator discussing North Africa. It was after von Arnim and his armies had surrendered. He spoke of our previous 'setbacks and reverses'—an infuriating misuse of language and a misrepresentation of facts unworthy of Britain. Next day Mr. Churchill in America referred with gallant common sense to our two years of 'defeats'. Thus we regained our pride with our honesty.

So, in Canada, I was doggedly determined not to falter for the sake of popularity. I would tell people what—it was obvious to anyone who knew both Germany and the Führer—Hitler would and could do to implement his world-design. In this purpose I was greatly helped by my chairmen, Governors, Mayors, industrialists creating the enormous war-plants destined to turn agricultural Canada into an arsenal, Reives of country townships and—when I got to Vancouver—by General Victor Odlum, who later commanded the second Canadian Division in England before going to Australia as High Commissioner for his own country. He believed, as I did, in the menace of a united and abnormally strong Germany intent on mass destruction for the sake of rewriting the book of Genesis. He made me talk—off the record—to a men's meeting in Vancouver. The gloves were stripped for that hour, and in the discussion which followed there was no quarter. I do not think those men believed in a victorious nation breaking at the summit of its success, but they did think in the strategical and tactical terms of the last war.

No one—certainly not I—had any conception of German mobility,

and we were all equally wrong in thinking France would fight. We were still drugged by the panoply of *la grande nation*, by the taxicab counter-attack of 1914 which saved *la ville lumière*, and by the fabulous French army which had the Maginot Line instead of guns, planes and tanks.

Still, in Vancouver and across the lovely pine-bordered sounds to the island where spring arrives—in clouds of blossom—before winter has time to get settled, I felt I was doing some good. Canadians are always ready to listen to anyone with ‘something real’ to say. But they cannot be taken in by—let us say—official discretion. Great names do not mean much to them unless backed by personality. Canadians are tremendously individual and less susceptible to mass hypnosis than most nations. They are eager to listen, even when they do not agree, providing the speaker has got a ‘hot’ subject, knows it and can put it across. But they will not stand for anyone who is less than an expert. Hence the unpopularity of some well-meaning official speakers who used words to disguise facts. Canada is enormously capable in many different spheres of action. She is vigorous, vital and experimental. She is as used to hard words as hard seasons. So—in her own words—she ‘can take it’, but there has got to be something to take. Canada takes offence too—and unnecessarily. I remember (in 1941) a delightful and famous speaker, asked why he was sure England could stand unlimited bombing, replied, “By the light in the women’s eyes.” His audience thought it was a bad joke and sentimental as well.

I made my full share of mistakes also. The Jews were often annoyed with me because I would not say they had sole right to Palestine, nor would I pretend their financiers were guiltless of manipulating exchange in Central Europe after the last war. For this Germany has never forgiven them.

Intellectual Communists who had read a lot about Russia but never been there, pounded me with hard questions which I could not answer. For I had not sufficient insight to comprehend the Soviet’s instinctive—and I suppose logical—fear that if, in 1939, she had allied herself with the democracies, Britain and France would collapse, leaving her to face Germany alone. I did realize Russia’s unnecessary persecution complex so that, of all nations, she who has achieved so much, is the most disturbed—not only by criticism, but by balanced judgment of her experiment. I did understand her determination to command her own ‘back door’, as Stalin had said in Moscow. The Baltic must be secure. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, parts of Finland and Poland were regarded by Soviet politicians as bolts and bars on the doors through which some capitalist power would try to break.

This much I could explain, but no more. For when the sturdy democrats of Canada’s farming Middle West asked me straight out, “What is the difference at this moment between Germany and Russia?” I could only say that I believed National Socialism to be

wholly destructive, while Bolshevism within the Soviet Union had proved itself on the whole creative. The retort generally came, "It's hard to choose between the O.G.P.U. and the Gestapo!" For Canadian farmers read during the endless winter evenings, and the books they like are 'serious stuff'. At great length, they write their opinions to their favourite magazine, probably Maclean's, the beacon of reasoned and informed opinion from Quebec to Vancouver Island. They cannot be put off by a slick use of words. They brush these aside, impatiently, as if they were a cloud of gnats in summer, and get down to the heart of the matter. I do not believe even that potent magic which is a combination of charm and enthusiasm will make Canada swallow a makeshift. She is determined on the best quality—on a platform or in a plough.

Some of my mistakes were amusing. Once in Toronto, while the orchestra was still playing, I noticed a lot of people crowded into an ante-room beyond the auditorium. They were all standing, and as the doors giving into the hall were comparatively narrow, I did not think they could possibly hear. So—unnoticeably, I hoped—I slipped into the wings to ask if they couldn't be provided with chairs and a loud-speaker. An indignant matron subsequently wrote to me asking if I was an anarchist, as I had deliberately left the platform during the national anthem.

On another occasion, in a city hall, with the Lieutenant-Governor putting in an official attendance, I had leant against the Muniment table in the middle of the platform. Indeed, at times I had sat upon it, using my fur coat as a cushion, with my feet preposterously dangling. The choice was this much rest, or insufficient voice to reach the packed galleries. I had travelled for six weeks on end, spent most of my nights in the train, been interviewed at meals, signed autographs till my hand was stiff, spoken morning, noon and night, facing at nine that particular day troops somnolent after a 'fatigue', and going straight on to talk to boys and girls in a secondary school, thence—with the utmost diffidence—to address several hundred business men at lunch. By evening, everything I saw was in a state of flux. The enormous hall behaved like a concertina. Faces swam towards me on waves of sound, made by my own voice, and receded as if on a tide. The Muniment table was the only solidity available. It saved the situation, but gave me a reputation for Bolshevism.

Lots of other mistakes I must have made, and the worst were my own fault, as when—deafened by the noise of a magnificent piano-forte solo at my ear—half suffocated also by the particularly effective central heating which seemed to be concentrated under my feet with the strongest arc lights I had yet encountered on any platform—I insinuated myself through a window, blind, deaf, gasping, in order to benefit by a little fresh air and silence before speaking for an hour. The more conventional were appalled by such breach of tradition,

though why a speaker should be hammered into mental protoplasm by the march of the Valkyrie executed against her ear-drum with the loud pedal down just as she is—earnestly and nervously—marshalling her facts, I cannot yet understand. I would have liked to have had the privilege of hearing that pianist alone in an immense, empty room with the lights low—and I took care to tell her so. We became friends over our mutual appreciation of music begotten by need out of a combination of time and place.

Winnipeg I remember for its sense of space and thriving speed. There I spent one of my happiest evenings. It began with trying to get a cocktail in company with Admiral Sir Howard Kelly who, also speaking for the National Council of Education, was one of its emphatic successes. Of him the Rotarians said, "He's not afraid to tell you all he knows. And he speaks of something he does know." His subject was the British Navy.

The Admiral had asked me to dine with him, and Manitoba was very dry. At least the only way we could legally drink was in a bedroom—curious bottled cocktails provided by the bell-hop. You gave him the money in advance and he went out and bought the drink—all strictly within the law. But Sir Howard and I were not of the right nationality or generation for enthusiastic private drinking. So we took the bottle downstairs and the head-waiter—appalled—provided cover in the shape of the largest napkins he could find, combined with tea-cups. From the latter—after secretive manipulations under the table—we drank our by this time warm and flustered cocktails. Neither of us felt particularly inspired, either by the ingredients—step-children of vermouth, distant acquaintances of hair wash—or by a sense of sin. The food fortunately was excellent. Mellowed, we went on to our diverse night's work.

Outside the hall where I was to speak, a crowd was pushing through the doors that somebody tried to close. "Oh, *please*—I must get in," I panted at last, considerably dishevelled. "Why you more'n anybody else?" asked a good-natured townsman. "I guess I want to hear her as much as you. They say she's a treat!" What more could any lecturer ask?

Here is the account of that meeting which the chairman, Mr. R. Hooton, sent to Major Ney in London. . . .

"Rosita Forbes has come and gone after telling Winnipeg some *realities* in a cheerful, and breezy, but *entirely convincing* manner. She showed a background of fundamental principles which everyone I talked to reaffirmed.

"Winnipeg audiences, as you know, are not spontaneous, but they were enthusiastic and what is more valuable to my way of thinking, Rosita Forbes, in narrative vein, was fruitful of much good. We could only obtain a hall to seat seven hundred people. We nevertheless 'shoe-horned' in one thousand souls (quite against city regula-

tions). Twenty people sat on the window-sills, seventy-five on the floor in front, one hundred standing and another hundred in the lobbies. Her voice carried beautifully, no one lost a word. Two hundred were turned away. We have reason to be grateful to this attractive person who, I think, unquestionably but unobtrusively rebuked that small type of mind which is so 'open-minded' that it has no principles of its own! I insist that I have not over-stated the case."

From Victoria, Mr. Sullivan wrote from the Department of Education: "Rosita Forbes captivated the hearts of the Senior High School students and those of Victoria College and the Normal school. They crowded the auditorium one thousand two hundred strong. . . . Rosita Forbes spoke for three-quarters of an hour and the whole audience was disappointed that she did not continue. . . . Her greatest triumph, however, was in her address to the Rotary Club yesterday. . . . It was a great call to service, and her interpretation of the men who are opposed to us and those who are in charge at home made a very deep impression upon the minds of the men present. . . . I wish you had been there to feel something of the real joy in hearing her and meeting her that I have tried to convey."

So it went on. "In my opinion she did fine work for the Commonwealth here, and I therefore introduced her with absolute sincerity on Thursday as a 'Great Briton'," wrote Mr. H. C. Holmes, another Chairman, while the Director of Education for Saskatchewan paid me the greatest tribute by recording his opinion: "Rosita Forbes is in a class by herself. . . . Every grown man ought to hear her." But I was most pleased by a letter from a doctor in New Brunswick. He wrote, "I hasten to thank you for the great service you have rendered the Dominion and the Empire by your radio talk this afternoon. . . . We need speakers of your calibre to dissipate this false sense of security, and I wish you could speak in every large town in the Maritime Provinces. . . . I served in the last war and hope to get over again with the second division."

In Saskatoon we had the gayest meeting—so crowded that people sat all over the organ and stood where there was no room to sit. My delightful Canadian cousin, Maurice Bushell, who fought in France in the last war and lost his only son—one of the first to volunteer as a pilot—in this one, supported me on the platform and brought friends to an impromptu beer-drinking—in my hotel room—afterwards. I think I went to sleep in the middle of a sentence. How we talked! How nice it was to meet Maurice again!

This sort of thing—I mean people sitting on window-sills and staircases—was good for me at that moment, for I was tired and depressed and fearfully anxious to be useful. The extremes of intense cold—out of doors—and excessive dry heat in the hotels and trains were as trying to me as the damp chill of our houses in winter is to Canadians. I had all sorts of aches, gradually concentrating in an ear. It was

inevitable that I should chip in some places and crack in others, because no ordinary middle-aged human body could do what I persistently asked of mine. By the time I got to Edmonton, Regina and Saskatoon, I was dividing the sixteen-hour days between short, blissful periods of lying flat on any available bed, generally with a doctor pushing benzedrine or camphor into me, and the surprisingly different platforms from which I spoke to men and women of all kinds—students, schoolchildren in the higher grades, gunners and airmen, factory or railway-workers, police, teachers, shop-assistants, clubs, universities and co-operatives, the growing voluntary services pledged to the war as knights to the grail, indeed to anyone who wanted to hear what chances England had and what she was likely to make of them. For towards the end of that winter, the U.S.A. press was sounding a warning note. I remember American headlines which ran 'The Allies Suffer First Major Defeat', but I don't remember to what incident they referred, for the great events in Norway had not yet preluded disaster on an international scale.

Getting iller, with my ear behaving worse and worse, I reached Toronto on my return from the west. There Lilian Watson took charge of me. She is one of the most efficient women I have ever met, and the National Council, of which the then Governor-General, Lord Tweedsmuir, was President, owes much to her. She is an excellent organizer with the admirably balanced intelligence necessary to an executive doing several different jobs at the same time. She never made a fuss. She never forgot. She could deal equably with criticism and adulation. Without hesitation, she handed me over to Dr. Berkeley Stark who, I think, is the best aurist west of the Atlantic. He and I had a preliminary skirmish in the sitting-room generously provided by the National Council of Education in the Windsor Hotel, largest, I believe, in its own hemisphere.

Green with exhaustion, I sat on a sofa and said—as is my habit—that I must be cured at once. For all my life I have been accustomed to doing things that have got to be done immediately, and to inducing other people to do likewise. It was snowing. I was miserable. The only thing I could contemplate with any pleasure was a bed. I knew I had no chance of reaching one until I had got through several speeches and an official reception. The waste-paper basket, I thought, would soon hold all that was left of me. Or I might be mopped up by the bell-hop on a piece of blotting-paper. Meanwhile Dr. Stark *must* mend my ear. As a prelude to dissolution, this would seem unnecessary, but I was set on it. I told him so. I said he must there and then galvanize me into sufficient energy to spread over another three weeks. It was a small thing to ask, but it would suffice.

Dr. Stark said he could not work miracles. He must have time and the proper tools. In fact I would have to come daily to the Medical Arts Building where he worked. "Impossible," I said.

Purposeful and very sure of himself, Dr. Stark made for the door. He had not smiled during the whole interview—ridiculous on my part—and I do not think he had said an unnecessary word.

"You must do something," I wailed after him. "You can't do nothing at all——"

I was wrong. He *could* and *did*. Thereafter he cured and also comforted me, for he had a tremendous belief in England and had already volunteered for service overseas. But the cure was effected under the conditions he chose—and it lasted. Since those days, divided between public platforms and the admirably equipped Medical Arts Building, where the whole science of healing is concentrated in superlative modern conditions under one roof, so that the human body can be studied in its entirety by experts conveniently contiguous, I have had an enormous respect for Canadian medicine and the deepest gratitude for Dr. Stark. Two winters running he put me together—orally—and talked a lot of sound common sense about the war, illumined by a blazing faith in the purpose and effect of Britain which was most encouraging. It must be satisfactory to do so much good, mentally and physically.

In the spring, the end of March I think, I left Canada for the U.S.A. New York, as usual, went to my head. To me it is, *par excellence*, 'the heavenly city'. Its architecture stimulates me. The temper of its living stirs me to a pitch of understanding which I cannot elsewhere achieve. I love New York. This may be due to the fact that, when there, I generally stay with the Walter Rosens. In many ways they are a remarkable family—and ordinary in none. The father is the kindest and most thoughtful of men, with an intellect as outstanding as his music would have been had he chosen to devote a lifetime to the piano instead of dividing it between the widest artistic interests in Europe and America. Walter Rosen is the head of one of the great private banking and broking houses which had to choose between these two branches of activity when President Roosevelt's New Deal limited the enterprise of Wall Street. At one time Benjamin Guinness was his partner and he married Lucie Dodge, daughter of the present Mrs. Lionel Guest, who lived, completely undefeated, on the most vulnerable and the most often raided scrap of English south coast. Her house, servantless of course, is just behind the guns and the front line defences. Her chickens seemed to thrive on whatever fell out of the air as a result of our fighters' successes.

The Rosens' house in New York is as great an enchantment as the first perusal—when one is very young and expectant—of the *Thousand and One Nights*. To its beauty mediaeval Europe has contributed a host of treasures. Time has been conquered, space bridged to create a loveliness exotic—yes, but balanced and restrained. If Walter and Lucie together had done no more than build—through years of careful search and intelligent choice—such a storehouse of

history and the good taste of centuries, they would have made a fair contribution to our world. For beauty, I am convinced, is as important for the well-being of a nation as health, freedom, or security. But the Rosens have done a great deal more. They have most generously encouraged and helped talent wherever they found it, without consideration of nationality, politics and creed. They have set a standard of international tolerance and understanding, while never wavering from their conviction that the Anglo-Saxon races must accept the burden of unrelenting sacrifice inseparable from their duty and their destiny as leaders of democracy. What an involved and pompous sentence that is to describe Lucie's and Walter's ideals! I think they are good to everybody who is sufficiently intelligent to strive for a worth-while purpose.

The daughter, Ann, herself no mean musician, married a Hungarian 'cellist with every form of good sense and genius as well. They are a delightful couple. I like them both enormously. And I have frequently longed to murder Hansi, any time after midnight, when we have all been arguing for hours about Hungarian politics in the unbelievable music-room—vast and rare as a temple of the gods, at Caramoor, the Rosens' country house.

The only son, young Walter, slender as a spear, keen and purposeful as such, dark, brilliant, good-looking, was destined to be a lawyer. He was a remarkable mathematician and had won scholastic honours. His future was assured. Inheriting his father's brains, his mother's charm, and some indescribable but potent force of ideal and idea from both, there were no limits to what he could achieve. He volunteered instead for the Canadian Air Force, having been refused by the American on account of some flaw in sight. He was killed in action after a raid on Kiel in 1944.

Lucie Rosen is famous because of her theramin. She is, I believe, the best player of this mysterious aerial instrument that America, ardently interested and always experimental, has produced. When she stands, very straight and completely absorbed, behind the curious creation of metal, drawing the loveliest winged notes out of the air, her hands are like birds. They seem to have no connection with her body. They control the 'cloud of fire' Shelley attributed to the skylark. Above them, intent, grave, very beautiful, Lucie's face has the clean-cut planes which belong to a swallow's flight. Her bones are incomparable. She will always be lovely, but she will never be quite of this—or any—earth. Many of the great painters have been inspired by her. Some of them, including Augustus John, have caught a brief impression of her beauty. It is always changing. I think there is nobody like her.

Into the Rosen house, near New York's Central Park, and into the warmly welcoming atmosphere this family always creates for its friends, I came from Canada where I had been stimulated, very kindly befriended and overworked.

It was a holiday to be in New York. Losing myself on Fifth Avenue the first day, I asked an enormous Irish policeman which way the numbers went—up or down. He understood at once, and he held up all the traffic while he asked me how long I had been over from the other side. "It won't be too bad for England, will it? She'll be able to stick it all right?" he questioned, anxiously. A very large private car hooted with obvious annoyance. Bus-drivers leaned out of their seats to protest. The traffic cop was not concerned with them. Peremptorily he waved them into silence, and only my embarrassment put an end to our friendly conversation right in the middle of Fifth Avenue in a rush-hour. The Irish dislike us except when there is a war on. Then some of their politicians dislike us still more, while the South rushes to enlist as fast as the North. British regiments to-day are full of intransigents from Eire who for years have wanted to knock England right out of the count, but will not let any other country do it. Being married to an Irishman, with every good quality except ambition, I appreciate the point of view which repeats 'For myself alone' and then gives away—for somebody else—every chance, and life at the end.

On my way up-town that first morning in New York my taxi-driver, a Jew, looked back over his shoulder and—in imminent danger of collision—told me at length what he thought of England. She was right to go to war. Grand, he thought it, and he'd like to be over there himself. But it didn't look as if we could put it over. The thrift and caution of his race were apparent when he said, "You should have gotten yourselves prepared first. What's the use of sitting still and pretending it's a war. If you can't fight, you'd better call it a day——"

I still had some clothes left from that last season of gaiety before the war. I put on my widest skirts, and ballooned about to parties, with Lucie in wonderful dresses that nobody else could wear, but so much more wonderful herself that I cannot remember what they were like. With us sometimes went Josephine Forbes from Boston, looking cool and assured and most attractively shaped like so many of her countrywomen, and Clara Thomas the artist inimitable in Borgia velvet with emeralds accentuating her superb shoulders. It was great fun. I do not remember going to bed. Everybody was enormously hospitable. Nearly everybody thought the war was a fake. They were too courteous to say so, unless they happened to like France or England so much that disappointment with one or other, or both, drove them into exasperated frankness.

The thing I found most bewildering was the idolatry of Finland in her epic struggle for liberty and the complete absence of any intention or impetus to intervene in practical fashion. I suppose that was always one of the puzzles with which lovers of America were faced—that candid and quite honest criticism of others for not doing what she had no intention of doing herself, that fundamental belief that she was too civilized for the wars which other nations must fight.

If historians say, "America would never have come into the war unless she had been so outrageously and unforgivably attacked"—by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour, it may be the truth. I do not know. But it is certainly nowhere near the whole truth. For America would fight at any moment for any cause which her people considered not only justifiable but essential. What delayed America fighting was the quality of our cause. She was not certain how far the European democracies were in earnest, or even if they were—indubitably—right. Once convinced of this, I think she would have gone into battle, on her own if necessary, *for* civilization, instead of *in spite of* it. For while we went soft and selfish in the twenty odd years since the peace treaties, America went all sorts of things—some not too good, of course—but, above all things, she went thoughtful. She probably thought too much. But, however that may be, the conviction grew upon her that—as President Roosevelt said to me in the White House, about 1934 I think, "No nation can afford to make war. No nation can afford even to win a war." Translate the word nation into civilization and you have the opinion of the average American, crystallizing into conviction as the results of Versailles and Trianon became obvious. Only when attacked on their own soil, could even the cultural idealists realize that, on occasions, it is necessary for civilization—as well as human beings—to risk doing what cannot theoretically be 'afforded'.

CHAPTER XXI

Spring, 1940

Building My House on Eleuthera

MY STAY IN NEW YORK WAS BRIEF because the Governor of the Bahamas had cabled me once or twice asking me to hurry across to Nassau while the winter visitors were still there. He wanted a speaker for the many war purposes to which the islanders had already contributed so generously. On my way south through Florida, the coloured porters and waiters on the train talked to me as if we were old friends. Many of them had been in the last war with the American labour battalions. They wanted to 'go over again to finish the job'.

Nassau was equally serious about the war. An elderly woman brought me a thin, gold pin and asked me to send it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer 'to help pay for some bullets'. It may well have been the only one she had.

I spoke first, in the local cinema, for King George's Fund for Seamen. Sir Charles Dundas acted as chairman and begged the audience

to remember that with our sailors it was not a question of giving what they could afford, but of giving all they had—their lives. The audience were children of the sea. Their ancestors had been as familiar with the ocean as we are to-day with the kitchen cupboards. Many Bahamans 'are seasick when they are *not* on the sea'. It is their natural element from which they have wrested food and—in the heyday of the sponging industry or the American civil war—wealth. Some of the Out-Islanders can still navigate 'by the bottom', without chart or compass. They are familiar with the shape of everything under water. The 'white seas' within the reef are as their garden plots. With boats patched and caulked, sails split by the hammering of the trade winds, they take on the ocean, knowing that 'you can't die till the Lord wants you'. Small wonder that this island people, whose forebears wrote the stormiest history in the Caribbean, felt themselves intimately concerned with the Empire's sea war of that 1939-40 winter.

Besides making speeches, 'still with the same note of warning—the war would be long and hard, there would be no quick break-up in Germany . . . all the things that Lord Kenmare recently made Prime Minister William Pitt say about the Napoleonic dictatorship, in his superb film, 'The Younger Pitt'—I started to build two houses on Eleuthera. It would be more accurate to say that the undefeatable Mr. Symonette, 'R.T.' as I called him, built them, but we planned them together. Unicorn Cay was my own design, and I contributed a good deal to the shape of its neighbour. Before leaving England, I had promised an acquaintance called Reginald Shurey, a bulwark of the Home Guard in one of London's boroughs, that I would choose the site of his house, see the building begun, furnish it from dining-table to dish-cloths, design a garden, plant it, clear bush for fruit and vegetables, and generally bring up—in grandmotherly fashion—the estate he visualized. First of all I had to buy the land, and that is no joke in the Bahamas. For whole families inherit a communal acreage which they refuse to divide. There are rarely any clear titles. A century may have passed since an Out-Islander walked his own boundaries. Bush therefore has an air suited to the Book of Genesis.

John Hughes, Chief Commissioner there for an archipelago which includes something like two or three thousand islets, helped me in the work I had so lightly undertaken. So he is really responsible for the first modern British settlement on Eleuthera. For without his advice and encouragement, without the hard labour he most generously put in on title-deeds and boundaries, we should never have reached the stage of building.

Obsessed not only by the first-hour-of-the-morning charm of the Bahamas, but by their astounding history, I wrote *The Prodigious Caribbean* between struggling with the character of Unicorn Cay and the Shurey pots and pans. The latter began to be a nightmare. I had never tried to make a house from the very beginning, and I would

have welcomed even the inherited chaos of Victorianism. Whatever I bought, the rooms wanted more. The kitchen was preposterously avaricious. Byrle Hughes came to my rescue. Together we made lists and spent long, hot afternoons in the hardware stores choosing implements for cooking, cleaning, gardening, washing. I did not even know the names or purposes of most.

Mrs. Kelly, who has successfully decorated hotels the size of villages and the houses of the preposterously rich, kindly reduced her ideas to the scale of our purpose and designed interesting furniture of the local woods. With so much house-making and housekeeping on my mind, so that I could not sleep at nights for counting the Home Guard's pantry-ware, or the yards of beach I laboriously acquired for him, with, I must now confess, surprising altruism, for Eleutheran shore is a fortune—it is odd that my book remained a history. Logically, it should have had a flavour of Mrs. Beeton's household encyclopedias and of the Crown Surveyor's impressionism.

That the book was written at all I owe to Lady Oakes. She lent me one of the most attractive houses on the island of New Providence. It had a strong personality and it was exactly the right size for my papers and my ideas. There was an enormous bedroom in which I could rove about when sleep eluded me. A century plant bloomed—once in a hundred years—within sight of the middle window. A humming-bird sat on the air while he talked to the hibiscus outside another. He always came in the mornings to eat the breakfast marmalade with which I smeared the petals.

The house, satisfactorily simple, stood on the top of a garden which slipped away to a lake. It was an old garden, with enormous palm-trees flirting in the wind, an oleander walk leading to a summer-house which had a definitely established position, and thickets of hibiscus, not the usual reds and pinks, but coloured like the heart of a flame. I used to walk about the garden late at night with the fireflies dancing under the scuffling leaves of the palms which were always chattering about their own affairs. The lake had the sheen of pewter even when there was no moon, and the low hills, wadded with bush, rolled gently under the sky—like breakers of a somnolent, hot sea. Sometimes, in the dusk, I walked for miles over the rough lanes Sir Harry Oakes' imported tractors and battering-rams had torn out of virgin growth. The perpetual wind of the Bahamas could not reach into the thicketed pines. It was quiet there, except for the hum and shiver of insects. In those days torn out of the war, so that always there will be a page missing in my life, I was steeped in Caribbean history. I saw in it the making of to-day and the struggle between imperialism, democracy and dictatorship, with the traces of that other struggle still to come between Liberalism, under whatever guise it fights, and Communism, between the spirits of nations fiercely patriotic and the state of internationalism. I remembered that the story of the Caribbean had been

written in blood and blotted with fire—always by the aggressors. Defence was ever at a disadvantage. The vitality of Europe ebbed with the tides of discovery and occupation, while American influence grew with swift, effective intervention in Haiti and Cuba. For four hundred years, hurricanes, political and religious, racial and psychological, swept the Caribbean Sea. Vast issues were decided by great men of all nations, in an elemental setting. In those rare, still nights, walking beside the lake, where the surf was faintly phosphorescent as it lapped against the rocks, I dreamed with Columbus and the men who followed—de Soto, more successful as a lover than a governor; Morgan, whose cruelties Hitler cannot equal; Raleigh and indomitable old Benbow fighting his one small ship against twenty, signalling furiously 'no surrender' with the bridge burning under him and only his own will to hold his spirit in his shattered body. I remembered de Graff and Van Horn, amazing adventurers, France's great Viceroy, d'Ogeron, the negro Emperor Christophe, and Toussaint, first democrat of the Caribbean. All these went into my book on a flood-tide of life merging the centuries from Columbus to Roosevelt.

In some mysterious way the garden on the hill had achieved the atmosphere of 'Le jardin clos'—the dream we all have in our hearts and to which neither our lips nor our hands can give shape. So it was an ideal place for writing, and for weeks I saw nobody at all—except those who planned with me a seventh day of creation on Eleuthera. Sir Charles Dundas had originated the idea. He wanted settlers who would farm their own land and by their example and the employment they gave, raise the deplorably low standard of living on the Out-Islands. He was among the wisest of Bahaman Governors, for he realized that island prosperity could not safely depend on tourism in Nassau, but his far-sighted ideas were not popular. The Bahamas are represented in their own parliament, consisting of the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council by men whose interests are vested in Nassau. With few exceptions, they are supremely uninterested in the Out-Islands. They are unable to look beyond an immediate prosperity based on real estate values on New Providence—which used to be an American playground—and the resultant trade for Bay Street.

Such an attitude is comprehensible in view of Bahaman history, for time and again illogical fortune has come to the islands without the monotony of labour. Only once has such brief but prodigious prosperity been connected with agriculture. But it was during this period of the Loyalist settlers—who refused allegiance to the Stars and Stripes after America's war of independence—that the Bahamas knew their only reasonable security. Those were the days of slave labour, and huge estates were cleared out of the forest known to Columbus, for the cultivation of sugar-cane, hemp and pineapple, while herds of sheep and cattle were raised on planted grass.

The abolition of slavery meant the end of farming on a productive scale. The whites wanted easy fortunes. The coloured people—descendants of African negroes—wanted to eat without working. The result of both follies is still to be seen in the Out-Islands where poverty and inertia are equally tragic.

Sir Charles Dundas and his Colonial Secretary, Mr. Jarrett, always on the wing between the Out-Islands which he literally talked into a good deal of enterprise both on sea and land, realized that—when the war got going as it was bound to do—some miracle of military necessity might bring another evanescent prosperity to Nassau, but nothing could save the Out-Islands except to grow the food they would soon be prevented by exigencies of shipping from importing.

"I don't want millionaires," said the Governor. "They won't live and make their homes on the Out-Islands. I want ordinary British settlers, middle-aged and sensible, who are used to country life and don't mind being alone." He agreed that being alone is the very antithesis of being lonely. With his assurance of official help and encouragement, he inspired me to look upon Eleuthera as a fragment of the imperial pattern conceived by Cecil Rhodes. I had always worshipped de Foucauld, peer and priest of France, and, at the cost of his life, pioneer of civilization in the Sahara. An uncle of mine had been the first Bishop of Mashonaland and a warrior in physical as well as spiritual terms. For he had hurried ahead of Wilson's column to face Lobengula and his victorious captains in the Royal Camp north of the Zambesi.

I had stayed with Marshal Lyautey in his newly-created Morocco when, driving in an armed lorry from Fez to Tlemcen, one was apt to come upon the bodies of French soldiers disembowelled and stuffed with straw. I could think of nothing more enthralling than spinning from a fragment of Bahaman Out-Island a thread in the modern pattern which is both national and imperial. But I must say I would have liked to feel the thread unbreakable and the design permanent so far as official plans were concerned. We are sometimes surprised and a trifle disturbed by American criticism of our Empire. But how can the hard-headed and extremely perspicacious business men of the United States be expected to admire a system which presents—just off their own coastline, at their back door so to speak—such an antediluvian aspect as the Bahaman Out-Islands. Many Americans visited their own scientific agricultural settlements at either end of Eleuthera. When they stepped over their own boundaries, they found themselves in a chaos of pothole and hummock—bad enough to smash tyres and springs, as well as the spirits of local farmers. Back to the days of the Ark went the Americans—but not with the philosophy of Noah!

In 1940, however, H.E. and Mr. Jarrett were always on the move between the Out-Islands. Such official activity made me hope that

rents in national and imperial prestige would be darned by co-operation between farmers, settlers and government. So with an enthusiasm only equalled by R. T. Symonette's ability to make the Out-Islanders work for their own benefit, I devoted my time, my wits and such money as I had earned in twenty years, to the translation of sandhills, rock and bush into a communal Eden.

My happiest days that year were spent with R.T. and occasionally with Jack Hughes watching the two houses grow. It was primeval labour. For everything had to be brought from Nassau and all machinery and milled goods from the States. The capacity of the schooner *Marmaduke* was stretched to the utmost—bringing baths and kitchen apparatus, timber, machines for making concrete blocks, cement, an engine for pumping and electric light, a steel windmill—and indeed everything that went into the house, except sand and labour—across the turbulent seas. Every truck in central Eleuthera was pressed into our transport service. The heftiest labourers were set to dig wells. The bravest were hired—in pairs—as night watchmen. But they generally ran away. 'Haunts' were the only things with which R.T. could not cope.

CHAPTER XXII

1940

Last Days of Illusion

FLYING VISITS TO ELEUTHERA were the high-lights of my two months on New Providence. The nearest I had come to the delight of creation as known to Adam and Eve had been the tearing to pieces and re-making of our London house. But it was far more fascinating to begin at the beginning and say, "Let there be earth instead of rock; let there be emptiness in place of crowded bush; let there be walls and rooms and baths with lots of shining taps instead of palmetto looking like tired Degas ballet dancers." On one occasion, distraught by the unnatural size of arches which should have brought to mind the bounding flight of an antelope, but which trod heavily upon the imagination like elephants in foal, I forgot all about a meeting in Nassau. Having reduced the arches to their correct proportions, R.T. and I—back in the capital, but still harassed—were spilling tea and breadcrumbs over the latest specifications when the telephone rang. A voice, trying to retain its balance between incident and event, said, "Do you know what has happened to Rosita Forbes? She was due to speak to the Daughters of the British Empire half an hour ago and

they are all here waiting. We have read and reread the last minutes. What can we do now?"

"I am coming," I said.

Within two minutes R.T. was driving me townwards. I do not think we had had breakfast or lunch that day, but—with one hand on the wheel and the accelerator well down—my companion made quick work of some sandwiches. I crammed cake into my mouth and drank milk out of a bottle which I had seized as I took a short cut through the pantry. I was still in trousers and canvas shirt, stuck full of burrs. My feet were bursting out of the only shoes which will stand up to Eleutheran bush, and these had rather given up the struggle, for soles and uppers were parting. I had tied them together with string. My face was shining with sweat and smeared with all that had happened to it during the hours of labour in the sun. I had no hat and no idea what my hair was doing.

R.T. looked at me with awe as he decanted me on the steps of Nassau's largest hall, but he wisely said nothing. Mrs. Kenneth Solomon, wife of a distinguished lawyer, then a member of the Government, came out to meet me. Not only did she look beautiful—as she could not help doing under any circumstances—but she was cool, calm, perfectly dressed, and she had lovely, uncrushed gloves. I remember these particularly, for she shook my hot, damp, grimy hand and contrived to look as if my appearance could not possibly be improved. Another charming and deliciously frocked woman presented me with flowers. Huge, red lilies they were, and I thought their savagery went well with my shirt which had lost two buttons.

Once on the platform, the only thing to do was to laugh. The audience, all in their best frocks, lovely to look at and always generously appreciative, gave one prolonged gasp and then laughed with me. I am sure I spoke of Europe as I knew it, and England as I hoped it would be and as it is to-day—intent on a real victory at the end of a real war. And I think that my extraordinary appearance added portent to my subject. It was never odder during London's bombing season, even when we stood in our pyjamas in Chapel Street about three in the morning and watched the next-door house burn, with searchlights making a cone over our heads and German bombers diving down by the flare they had made of our roofs.

When Norway was invaded, the first I heard of it was from a friend's chauffeur inseparable from his wireless. He used to telephone me any news he considered sufficiently satisfactory to warrant interrupting my writing. How strange it is to remember that the first of Hitler's unprecedented victories stretching from Oslo to Paris was hailed as the prelude to his defeat. My chauffeur friend was certain the British fleet would treat the Skagerrak as if it were Southampton Water. Even Mr. Churchill spoke—with an enthusiasm to which we listened breathless and appreciative—of 'not another shipload of German ore' com-

ing out of Narvik while the war lasted. And most people thought it would not last very long! A soldier, connected for many years with European intelligence, wrote me that Hitler was suffering from a brainstorm. He had been 'sitting pretty' behind the Siegfried Line, where no one could touch him, and now he'd been 'fool enough' to offer us a target on land and sea. He would soon regret it.

How blind we all were! The Bahamas were particularly jubilant. All those unexpected and quite illogical prosperities—piracy and privateering, wrecking, gun-running for the Southern States, slave labour and boot-legging, tourism and soaring land values—had convinced them of the special interest of Providence. Once again the Lord had interfered.

Having always been apprehensive, I was less certain of salvation rolled up in a parcel with a German label and handed out free of charge by Hitler. It did not fit in with what I had learned in the Reich. I could not see why Norway, obstinately peaceful, which had never fought a modern war, or any war that I could remember, should be able to hold out when Poland—born to battle, heir to inconceivable heroism—fell in three months of unexampled human splendour. I remembered a Norwegian peasant saying, "We are very fortunate—we shall never be invaded. For among us no one has very much, and all of us together have nothing that anybody else wants." I thought at the time that his geography was weak. Hitler would certainly want at least a predominating influence in Scandinavia to put a barrier between Russia and England. For these two countries, I believe, if only they could understand each other—and stop pretending—could make a new heaven on a new earth.

In Nassau everyone repeated that Hitler had made his first mistake. So I tried to believe it with the rest. On our seventeen-mile-long scrap of island we were in the outer darkness so far as truth was concerned. We had 'news' instead. That is always very different.

We listened to contradictory words on the radio, but generally we could only get American stations. These sounded first uncertain, then bewildered. Fear began to creep into the voices of commentators. They were completely out of touch with the situations Hitler was developing—according to plan and, by May, three months ahead of plan.

I cannot remember when and how the first perception of disaster came to me. I do not think, till I hurried back to New York in June, that I realized much of what had happened. For pride, as well as distance and isolation, prevented us grasping the full measure of our defeats. One day, Jack Hughes rang up to tell me Germany had invaded Holland. Remembering the stalwart Dutch, their indomitable Queen, and what I had always thought of as their 'impermeability' to foreign influence, I was sure they would blow up their dykes and flood their flat country. They would do this in orderly fashion and with time to spare. The Germans, I told myself, could not swim to victory.

Just about then, a delightful American, Mrs. Arthur Verney, gave a party at her beach-house. She gave it for her own husband, the traveller and shot, to whom the mysterious triple frontier of China, India and Burma is a happy hunting-ground. The sea provided music. It shuffled, soft as silk on a counter, across the beach. On a patio floored with old Cuban tiles, small tables had been set. The stars were our candles. Braziers heaped with charcoal glowed under the palms. The food was succulent and original. Everyone wore their best frocks, and for once there was no wind. I sat between the Governor and Sir Harry Oakes, who told us of adventure in the Yukon. Our hostess made a fourth, and she cleverly kept us talking, but I felt as much alone as Don Cristobal's mariners on the *Santa Maria*. They had left the known world. They were at the mercy of forces they could not understand. There was no precedent for what was happening to them. They could not tell what lay ahead—in Cathay. But they were afraid, for the future might be too big for them.

Perhaps Sir Charles felt this too, but he reassured his American hostess. England, he said—as our statesmen were saying at home—was prepared for every eventuality. France might lose land, but never her head. She would fight to the Bay of Biscay. This was the only thing we really believed. The rest, we know, was a necessary official expression of faith without truth. So, I suppose, the guests talked at the Duchess of Wellington's ball, on the eve of Waterloo.

H.E. drove me to Lady Oakes's house, unruffled on the top of its hill. "If things get worse, I am going home," I said. "You can't," he retorted. "I can't let you. And—really—things can't get worse. The turning-point must come." But it did not.

Next day Jack Hughes telephoned the news of the surrender of the King of the Belgians. Neither of us believed it. But I sat down heavily on the nearest hard object and bleated incoherencies into the mouth-piece. "It won't make any difference even if it is true," said Jack. "The French are at their best on their own soil. You know how they can fight with their backs to their farm walls—they won't yield an inch of their own fields." Fervently I agreed. I always thought Norman and Breton would give the last drop of their blood to their country while refusing it a single sou from their savings! So they would have done, I believe, had they not been lost in a fog of politics and propaganda.

That evening I smoked too much, and I would probably have taken to drink had there been anything suitable in the house. There was not. So I made a lot of Ovaltine and troubled Delphine—my delicious, slow-speaking, slow-thinking coloured maid—by restless peregrinations in the garden. "I thought you was a haunt," she said. "I never see you walk like that. You got something mighty big on your mind. You behave just like the ghosties when they can't stay quiet in their

graves." I had England on my mind—and the difficulty of getting a passage.

In the morning the news was confirmed. We all went about, haggard and hot with fury. We knew nothing, of course, of the terrible choice by which the Belgian King, responsible primarily for his own defenceless nation, had been faced. We did not know that French politicians had already decided to give up the fight and that ours knew it. I felt personally betrayed because, on my geographical visits to Belgium, I had been so graciously welcomed by two generations of the royal family, and I admired them all enormously.

If I am sufficiently hurt, I always feel sick. So, I suspect, do a lot of other women. Nassau in those days, the more horrible because of our isolation and ignorance, is confused in my mind with the misery of winter gales in mid-ocean on a bucketing tramp. The most comforting thing in it was the indomitable Jane—Lady Williams-Taylor. Enormous-eyed, with wits and courage to match, she kept up our spirits. She also fed us—delectably—whenever we wavered.

After much argument with H.E., I got a permit to leave and a berth of sorts on a cruising boat bound for New York. France by then was losing heart and—with it—Paris. None of us could guess what had happened to the French army. The wildest rumours flew. At that moment I was rather popular, for I appreciated the strength and value of North Africa. I could assure my friends on New Providence—British and Bahamans equally distraught, Americans blankly amazed—that so long as France held from Morocco to Tunis, nothing was irrevocably lost. But it was Jack Hughes who did the most good. Next year I was destined to find his illogical optimism dangerous, and we argued to the verge of exasperation. But when the remnants of the French armies disappeared before Germany had time to attack, and our own fought through such desperate, hopeless moments as those which immortalized the 51st at St. Valéry-en-Caux, his stalwart unreason was exactly the encouragement we needed. "We get on best alone," he said. "After this there will be nobody else to let us down. You'll see, we shall make twice as quick going to Berlin."

He did his job well. Comforted, I went on board the small American liner, crowded with clerks and typists who had saved for fifty weeks to enjoy a fortnight's foreign holiday. Crazy with excitement—for everything in Havana or Jamaica or Puerto Rica had been a million-dollar emotion—they drank a good deal, made love, made plans, talked a lot, were as friendly as puppies scrambling out of their box for a first sight of the world, and knew nothing of the war. Eur-ope, in two syllables, was a long way away.

There was one Frenchman on board. I longed to talk with him, but he avoided me.

CHAPTER XXIII

June, 1940

'Dunkirk'—in New York. Return to England—and the Unexpected

EARLY ON A GREY MORNING, we docked in New York. The sky-line gave me a sensation of relief. It has the freedom of birds' flight. It is the nearest thing I know to heaven. Mountains don't count. Their aspirations are not their own. New York's towers are imperturbable. I cannot imagine them shaken. It is terrible when some wonderful old building in Europe is destroyed by Nazi paganism, but the beauty of Warsaw and Rotterdam belonged to the past—to memories in which we wrapped historic fact, but the architecture of New York is our own achievement and the inspiration of the future.

In sharp contrast to the sky-scrapers, immutable and certainly at peace with their heads all mixed up in the clouds, was the impression of disaster on the quays. There was not a smile. Men's faces seemed to be stretched and held in the same stiffness of amazement. English pound notes were selling as low as a dollar fifty.

Walter Rosen met me. His sister had married a Frenchman. He did not know where she was or what had happened to her. He could not even send her money.

I shall never forget those days waiting for an east-bound boat—any boat. It was just after Dunkirk. England had faced the worst defeat of her history. The world was still dazed by Hitler's success. Americans thought it was the end. A continent had gone under. Their own was not as safe as they had supposed. Churchill had made his memorable speech, "We will fight on the beaches and in the streets. We will fight in the houses——" Whatever mistakes he made previously or subsequently, whatever he does in the undecided future, England owes him for those words and for the spirit which inspired them more than she can ever repay. For the lead he gave her, when Hitler could have finished his own war on our own soil, he stands among the 'few' to whom 'so many' 'owe so much'.

But nobody in New York believed for an instant that England could survive. For the death of France they were in desperate mourning. For the dissolution of our island—under the weight of Nazi material, men and metal—they were preparing. The women locked away their jewels. Wall Street was a tomb. Men of substance engaged guards for their houses. The bad days of prohibition, when lawlessness stalked into the open, machine-gun in hand, were repeated on Fifth Avenue. Householders were held up under their own windows. According to their sex, they gave up their wallets or their summer furs.

The Rosens were grave and sad, but they maintained, with their knowledge of Europe, an outlook which admitted the possibility—if not the probability—of salvation.

I spent most of my time in steamship offices. In vain, sensible and extremely sympathetic managers assured me, "No ships are sailing—the situation is too obscure," and, "If you did get started, there'd be no guarantee where you'd go. We really don't know what's happening anywhere."

Of that heart-breaking fortnight, when every British pulse in New York was beating with the clock—"no time, no time, how can I get there in time"—I remember two incidents. The first was a walk in the rain with young Walter. He had succeeded in squeezing through the first 'eye of a needle' on the way to becoming a Canadian Air Force pilot. His eyes looked red and strained. He was doing violence to them without spectacles. We walked a long way, Walter bare-headed and blinking at everything lettered. "What *is* the third word on that signpost?" he would ask with concentrated fury. "I can almost see it."

We talked of our convictions. I had loved many places more than England—until that moment. 'I had been kept for much of my twenty years' grown-upness in a constant state of shame and anger at her purposeless pretences and her compromises. But now, all I wanted was to be there—on that ridiculous, conceited, incomparable island which at least would fight. Of that there was never any doubt. What nonsense we talked until we were forced into sense! Then the makeshift ranks closed—behind a Prime Minister of nearly seventy—standing alone, unshaken, absurdly and sublimely sure of themselves until, more than a year later, the Nazis gave us a major European ally by attacking Russia.

Walter, staring angrily at a milestone, said all in a breath, "That's a three, isn't it? Well—if the British Empire and American democracy are not worth fighting for, I can't see that life's worth living. I mean, there's nothing left at all, is there? No, it isn't a three—it's a five. I always get them mixed."

The other moment I remember is sitting on the top of a hill in Westchester County with Kerr Rainsford, a clever American architect who had written a play about the Norman invasion of England. Lucie Rosen had sent us out to walk. For even the timeless beauty of Caramoor—that great house created out of the treasures of Europe and the genius of America—could not give peace with newspaper headlines blaring the armistice terms.

In hot sunshine, seated on a log, the architect read me his play. Between branches, I could look down over the woods and fields, the gardens and the scattered houses. It was all very well ordered. The earth had been trimmed and tamed. Wealth and talent had dressed the country as if for a party. But soon I forgot the neat charm of West-

chester because of Saxon Harold's uncertainties. The American had well portrayed him—a man torn between his own honour and the need of England. Could anything have been more dramatic at that particular moment than the theme the American had chosen. He read well. The play developed smoothly till the inevitable moment when the Saxon archers, out-numbered and out-armed, made a last stand on the Wiltshire downs. At this instant, I thought, men of my blood, my own husband perhaps, are fighting—as desperately and as hopelessly—on the same land, for the same purpose.

Harold was killed. A thane looked down at his body. Wounded himself, he could no longer draw his bow. He saw the Norman spearmen advance behind a wall of shields—the tanks of an earlier age. And he said to the dead King and to the archers heaped around him, "I have seen the death of England." Quietly, without emphasis, the American read the words.

Next day the Rosens drove me to New York. Lucie wore the most becoming hat. It was a bunch of flowers, very gay, tilted over one eye. They took me to lunch at Robert's and we all ate prodigiously. I felt *naked and unadorned, for I had left everything I valued in my friends' charge.* They were convinced I would have no need for a fur coat or even a cigarette-case.

It was an uproarious last meal. Everybody talked a lot. We all exaggerated what we did not in the least feel. Only at the end Walter said, "You can come back to us any time. You won't get farther than Ireland. You are mad to go—but I suppose you must."

Embarkation had the aspect of the best funerals. Hour and place were supposed to be secret, although the window offices must have had an excellent view of the proceedings. Nevertheless we crept like moles into a tunnel. We crossed vast, echoing sheds, strangely empty. Customs officials and policemen looked at us as if we were already corpses. With gravity and pity they hurried us on board. Lucie wept a little. As far as I remember, several strangers, men and women, kissed me.

Nobody thought of asking what was in our luggage. We could have taken away with us the American equivalent of the Koh-i-noor or the State Seal without question.

At the last moment we had to sign a form saying, in effect, that we did not mind being blown up—on purpose or by mistake—for the ship carried high explosives.

There were only a handful of people on board, among them Jack Mitford, uncle of Unity, and the delicious Mrs. Lee Guinness returning from a brief business visit to American factories, for since her husband, the racing motorist's death she had taken on his factory and was making precision instruments for the Government. The ship was as big as a village, and we used to wander about in search of each other with every new tale invented by the stewards. They had unlimited

pluck and a lot of imagination, so the voyage was not dull. When there was no submarine alarm to keep us interested, ancient mariners told us of their hair-raising experiences in the last war. They all said they had been torpedoed several times, and one had a very popular story—which he had to repeat whenever we were bored—of sinking with his ship and being blown up again through the funnel. After it Posie Guinness and I studied the smoke stacks. "If there was nothing inside them but us, we should be all right," she said, "but I wouldn't like a crowd." Bright-eyed, with a vivid, pointed face and a curled mouth, she was a great asset on board. For the States had exasperated her into a violence which even the Gestapo would have found difficult to emulate. "Of course it's all right!" she said, small, gay, pugnacious. "We are going strong and we are the only people who matter!" We laughed at her bellicose intentions and pretended to be shocked by her insularity. But at that moment, I imagine, most Britishers—back to the wall, without arms or munitions—felt much like Sinn Fein. . . . "For ourselves alone."

Jack Mitford told me about Unity—how on the day after the Nazis had invaded Poland, she shot herself in the head. Poor child, she had dreamed great dreams of young Germany and middle-aged England working hand in hand, and she had believed that Hitler, whom she admired as the last of the Prophets, could act the part of Jewish Moses! She saw her dreams turn to nightmare and she would not face the bleakness of reality. She walked a good way with her revolver, followed by a sensible German policeman, who doubted her intentions. Deliberately, she fired one shot into the ground to test her weapon, and the second into what she intended to be her brain. The bullet was a toy affair and it was deflected by a bone. Unity was taken to hospital, well looked after by excellent doctors and nurses, and sent out of the country by the Führer's orders as soon as she was well enough to travel. Such was the silly, sad story, not at all like the melodrama invented by the press. If the Gestapo had shot at man, woman or child, the result would have been death. They do not miss their victims.

During the long, monotonous crossing, deprived of all news, imagining we should be fortunate if we were landed in Ireland, or Iceland, or even Portugal, the men took turns in reinforcing the official watches. They volunteered for extra shifts at the guns.

It was an odd sensation being without news at all—when the world was changing hands. From day to day we did not know whether we still had a country. I felt as if I were on one of those floating islands in the Chaco swamps. We were as much cut off from all we were accustomed to consider habitual and necessary.

Our cargo of high explosives weighed on the Captain's mind. He had been very much against taking passengers. Smoking on deck was forbidden. The sailors watched us as if we were in a reformatory. Brittle as glass in careless hands, we steamed across the Atlantic in a

series of enormous curves. It was hot. It was wet and foggy. It was cold. It was very cold—and we thought we were perhaps going to put in at Reikjavik. Then it grew mild and we had a prolonged alarm, possibly off the coast of Ireland. We had not any idea where we were, but we dutifully sought our life-belts from the magnificent cabins where—in spite of orders—they reposed. For hours we remained on deck beside the heterogeneous collection of French guns dating from the last war, which we were taking to the relief of Britain. They looked old and small. We could not imagine them disturbing the equanimity of a Nazi tank. Posie called them 'the mosquitoes'.

Nothing happened that afternoon. The stewards, very cool, smart and efficient, brought us tea on deck. It was all preposterously English and traditional. . . . "Two lumps of sugar, Madam—or will you have it in the lifeboat?" I could imagine my maid of long ago, standing beside my bed, speaking in much the same cherishing tones. The British are so good at looking after people. It is a pity, perhaps, that they insist now that they only want to look after machines.

After the second week, most of us began to wonder what we should do about money if landed in Eire. We had not a hundred dollars between us—owing to currency restrictions—and we had been seriously shocked by the behaviour of pound notes in New York. At that moment Eire seemed to us foreign and a long way from England. Just as we were making the most cheerless calculations, a Treasury official whose job was to disentangle colonial finances when somebody went shy of an imperial jack-pot, recognized a scrap of coastline. He said it was the Isle of Man. We did not wholly believe him because we had discovered in him the temperament of the North-West Mounted Police. He was prepared for the worst, but doubtful if it would happen, and in his experience nothing was ever as good or as bad as 'information received'.

Next morning we reached Liverpool, and everybody—metaphorically speaking—fell on our necks. Two of my friends in the Police took me out through the bowels of the ship. They were pleased with me for coming back and very pleased with themselves for being there. England, they said, was doing fine. It was as if she had been ill and in the hands of too many—foreign—doctors.

My fellow-countrymen, I found, were not at all worried about themselves. They thought they were much better off without allies whom they had to look after like wet-nurses. This opinion was constantly expressed. I began to realize why other nations dislike us so much. We are, of course, intolerable, but I do think we were wonderful—also—that summer. I do not see why I should not say it. The Russians constantly express satisfaction at their own heroism, and they have every right to do so. But England is small and tight and narrow and conventional and unable to express anything even if she does—by a miracle—feel it.

An old lady I know, nearer eighty than seventy, autocrat of a large country house, ordered her maid to put extra pins into the coil of silver hair perched as a tea-pot handle on the very top of her head, and asked for her largest handbag. She then took a train to London, which she had not visited for years, drove straight to a gunsmith's and said to the astonished assistant, "I want to buy a revolver." Centuries of authority were in that woman's blood, and nobody had ever refused her anything. The young man behind the counter, dazed after a night on guard, was certainly not going to begin. "What kind of revolver were you thinking of, Madam?" he stammered. "I want a big one that will kill a lot of Germans," said the dowager.

I knew some factory girls in Yorkshire who, at the end of the day's shift, heard—on the wireless—the news of France's capitulation. In silence they listened. Then one of them turned back to the works. "We're all alone now," she said to her friends. "I reckon it doesn't matter. We'll have to work a bit harder, that's all. We'll work all night. We'll go on till we drop. Come on now."

Months later, in a train, I talked with an elderly woman who had just come back from New York. She said, "I have a married daughter over there and she wanted me to stay with her in her Park Avenue apartment—for the whole war—but I thought I might be some use in England. My sons are fighting and my daughters this side are working, of course, but I could cook or clean. They will need somebody to do the ordinary, everyday jobs." I asked her how she visualized the future, and she replied with the utmost calm, counting the stitches of her knitting, while an R.A.F. pilot on leave pulled down the window-blind because an enemy plane, having missed us with two bombs, was machine-gunning the engine. "I expect we shall have a bad time——" There was a pause while the bullets went very quickly plop-plop down the length of the roof. Then as the German sheered away, the grey-haired, pink and pleasant woman continued, "Well, that's over! What a funny noise it was! As I was saying, we may have to put up with a lot, but we're a good number on this island—fifty million, isn't it, or perhaps I've got the figures wrong. I'm not good at sums. But we can afford to lose half, I'd say, and still have plenty to start again and get going after we've beaten the Germans."

The pilot, who was young and very, very tired, caught my eye. He looked amused. I think my mouth was wide open. If old ladies could suppose twenty million casualties as the price of victory and be quite happy because England would be still there at the end of them, our future seemed to me assured.

CHAPTER XXIV

August, 1940, to January, 1941

In the Bombing of London. Our House Goes. The War— For Ordinary People

WHEN I GOT BACK TO LONDON, that June of 1940, I found my husband organizing a special Military Intelligence section concerned with land, sea and air. It was, I think, the first attempt at such a combination. Sailors, soldiers and airmen worked together in the War Cabinet building. It must have been an interesting job, and one particularly suited to my husband's original and drastic methods. By this time he was fifty-nine, and years over age for a Colonel.¹ He thought he would soon get what he called 'another bar to his bowler hat'. The newspapers were shrieking for younger and younger men. As a result, excellent Generals were lost to us at the moment when they could have been most use, and an Air Marshal retired while his name was the best password in the Middle East.

I suppose the bombing of London and other big towns was as different for every individual concerned as any other major event between birth and death. That summer Arthur and I lived in a small house belonging to my sister, in Chapel Street off Belgrave Square, which is near Victoria Station and the Southern Railway lines. So we were what bomber command would surely consider 'within the target area'.

On a brief holiday from his office, my husband drove me to Richmond Park. We were both very tired and we lay flat on our backs at the edge of the bracken and watched the sky. It was early August. We saw our fighters go out in formation. We watched them come back, one by one and fewer. We counted eagerly and said nothing about the result. Then there was a dogfight overhead—far up in the clouds. We saw the white spirals of smoke from the exhausts—the battle flag of the fighters. Bombs were dropping. We saw khaki figures run across the grass to a barbed-wire enclosure where we supposed there were guns. "I must get back," said my husband.

That was how the battle of London began—for me. In our little house, which shook and cracked whenever the Germans went for the neighbouring railway, we had a beautiful dug-out, shored up with stout beams. I looked into it once when nothing was happening and I thought I would rather be anywhere above ground. But our neighbours slept there for months on end. They had their own mattresses

¹ Colonel McGrath left the Army in 1929 and went back to do special work in this war.

and blankets, candles, books and food. I thought they would probably be suffocated if the little frail house fell on top of them, but they liked being underground. So did one of our maids. She was charming and terrified. Whenever there was a terrific thump, her knees gave way. She dropped anything she held and sat down—on floor or stairs, or the edge of the bath—whatever happened to be handy. She could not help it. Her physical—or is it biological—make-up would not stand bombing. There were lots like her. It is no use pretending there were not. Some got better. Some had to go to the country and stay there, or they would have been imbeciles. Fortunately there were also lots of people who were entirely indifferent to bombs—like my husband who, tired after a twelve-hour day in the M.I., used to fall asleep in an armchair beside the sitting-room fire—with a row of candles stuck by their own wax to the mantelpiece in case the power station was hit and the lights went out. This often happened, and when the gas main was blown up we could only cook on a Primus stove. It was very much of a picnic. Fortunately our cook was unimpressed by the noise which the Germans made. Like my husband, she had no apprehensions and—I suppose—no imagination. When there were fights overhead and our other Abigail had collapsed—green and floppy—on the stairs, she used to lean out of a window to watch and keep up an excited commentary, “I believe that’s one of ours! He’s got him! He’s coming down! Oh, that’s a bit of the wing——” Most of her was outside the bathroom window by this time. I wanted to see what was happening, for there was a grand show over the garage roofs. The two of us stood in the bath and leaned out, struggling for front place. “There, I told you so!” said the cook, gripping my shoulder. She was young, strong and fair—making munitions now, I expect. Breathlessly we watched the battle. A burst of flame and the fuselage of a plane came down. The wings followed much more slowly. Then we saw a parachute open. “The German’s done!” shrilled a voice in my ear. “That’s him burning!”

We heard afterwards that the British sergeant pilot had come down safely near the Embankment and the German had crashed into the roof of a jeweller’s shop.

That night we had a burglary. My husband had come back late from duty and gone straight to bed. I had dined and gone to the cinema with Ian Lauderdale. There was a raid on when he dropped me at home, so I took a mild sleeping-draught and heard nothing more till Arthur stalked into my room early next morning. “Wake up!” he ordered. “I’ve got a police inspector here. Has anything of yours been stolen?” When I had blinked myself awake and examined the dressing-table, I could answer in one word. “Everything,” I said, and with extreme crossness got back into bed.

The burglar, we supposed, had slipped in through the front door—in the black-out—while our neighbours pilgrimaged as usual to our

cellar. The rat probably waited on the ground floor, hidden behind one of our new black curtains, until the last steps went downstairs. Then he thought he had the house to himself. He must have got a shock when he found Arthur and me asleep on the third floor, my nose buried in the pillows, my husband's—next door—turned to the ceiling. But he did not lose his head. He swept my pearls and jewelled clips from the careless heap I had made on the dressing-table and took Arthur's possessions all neatly arranged on a chest. He was not caught.

Out of that nightmare autumn, when the raids were punctual as the dinner-hour—the siren with the soup and the first bombs with the next course—a few nights stand out. I have read in American papers so much about our shelters. No doubt they were packed. So was the Tube, but largely with workers who had to have some sleep within reach of their work. For, with all but underground transport at a standstill, they could not go back and forth to the suburbs. But very many people did not change their habits at all.

I remember the first night when London was really a battlefield. Till then there had only been tentative raids. It was a Saturday, I think. Arthur and I had gone to the Empire Cinema and we heard nothing during the course of the film. When we came out, I suppose about ten, the night was blazing red. The crowd stood, awed into stillness. A huge commissionaire, with the last war's ribbons across his chest, said to my husband, "They're fairly putting the stuff down to-night, sir." Both had been gunners.

A girl laughed on a high note. "It's fearfully exciting!" she shrilled. Otherwise there was silence. The crowd moved into the empty road and in the bright, red light made its way home.

There were no taxis in Leicester Square, or in any case no drivers. These had gone to ground. Arthur and I walked towards Piccadilly Circus. Young men and their girls stood in pairs, staring at the sky. For the first time I saw battle on a big scale. Searchlights stabbed into the clouds. We watched them catch the small, silvery crosses that were planes and hold on to them, following relentlessly every twist and turn of the enemy. The searchlights were shut off to give our fighters a chance. Suddenly coloured lights came down. They were huge, scarlet flowers, with their petals loose. It was all astoundingly beautiful as well as terrible.

London was lit by the glare from the burning docks—where our firemen worked till their hoses melted in the heat, where the storage tanks had blown up and the river was covered with blazing oil, where every barrage balloon had been shot to pieces, and German bombers could come down unhindered to the height of the flames they had lit. We had no guns worth mentioning in those days. So we stood—in Piccadilly—and listened to the long whine of the bombs before they crashed into the houses, crumpling them like a pack of cards.

A taxi, its driver crazy with fright, jolted on to the pavement as we crossed St. James's Street and nearly knocked down my husband. He swore—much angrier at that than at what the Nazis were doing to London. For Hitler must not be able to make us afraid. That would be preposterous. So Arthur thought, and throughout that winter he refused to alter any of his habits—which made life decidedly odd.

At Hyde Park Corner we had a clear view down the Mall. By this time the city was deserted. As a background to the great gates of the park, we saw dockland going up in billows of fire. They rolled into the sky like enormous ostrich plumes. I thought of the flares on the Persian oil-fields, when wells are burning themselves out, and for a moment it seemed to me that I was back among the wild hills of Suleiman el Masjid. Then I realized it was London.

On our doorstep, the cook, greatly excited, met us with a telephone message. A car was coming to take Arthur to the War Cabinet building. It had a rough passage down Victoria Street, for a bomb fell just in front of it. A crater yawned from one pavement to another. The lamp-posts looked giddy and a bus was lifted into neighbouring shop windows.

Blast had removed the driver's hat and all the glass in his car. But he reported with Cockney cheerfulness, adding that he'd had a "bit of a dust-up". We offered him a drink. He said he wouldn't mind "a cup of cocoa". Our cook was enchanted with him.

Another night I remember dining with a War Office colonel in his flat overlooking Grosvenor Square. We were drinking most excellent cocktails in the toy bar. He had put on a Chaliapin record. Tall, dark, amusing, with short-sighted, intelligent brown eyes, he was talking with his usual casual brilliance while the butler was in the act of producing soup in the adjoining room. Bombs were thumping down in handfuls. An orchestra of guns was blaring away on different notes, for this was later, when Churchill had summoned guns from everywhere and nowhere—rabbits out of a hat—to the defence of the capital. Whine followed whine as the air was split by those horrible forty seconds of sound preluding the metal jelly-fish effect of bombs splaying into the earth as they struck. But the last whine developed into a shriek. I thought it was on top of us. My heart missed a beat and went on too quick—in the wrong place, I thought. It had got muddled up with my stomach. My host stopped speaking and looked straight at me with amused interest. "Whew, that's near," he said without spilling a drop of cocktail, though I was gripping his other arm. The crash drove in our windows and sent the heavy brocade curtains straight up level with the ceiling. It had obliterated the great house next door, cut it out with a knife as if it had never been there.

"That must have given the soup a cold turn, sir," said the butler without turning a hair.

I felt like jelly which would not set. But we had a very good dinner,

in a howling draught. Then the Colonel walked home with me, talking of education in the Army. He would not wear his tin hat because I only had a scarlet feather cap shaped like a saucepan without a handle. How I wished for a brim, or even a veil. Three inches of brim would have made all the difference to my morale. Right at the end of the last war, when too young for the British Services, I drove an ambulance at the front for the French Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires. I used to watch an elderly vine-planter putting up his Sunday umbrella where the wind-screen should have been, while we waited under shell-fire to evacuate some advanced dressing-station. I knew exactly how he felt.

The glass in Grosvenor Square was falling with the sound of hail. Park Lane was in holes. Terrific noise attended our crossing of Hyde Park corner. I was frightened, as I always am in heavy bombing, but also numbed by the recurrence of thumps and bangs. My legs took me neither too fast nor too slow from street to pavement, but I do not suppose I listened to much of my companion's conversation. As we turned into Chapel Street, the other end of it seemed to go up to heaven. It was the front of the Howard de Walden's great house at the Belgrave Square corner being shorn off. Much of the Austrian Legation followed, with the windows and the stables of Lord Monsell's house. In all of these I had danced. They had been leisurely, superb balls, uncrowded, very much at ease.

As we hurried down the little shaken street whose old-fashioned houses were not prepared for such buffeting, I saw our door was open. Horrified, I broke into a run. But it was all right. My husband and the cook had gone out to see if they could help. It was not necessary. The A.R.P. were capable as usual. How they worked that autumn! And when did they ever sleep?

On the other side of the square, Halkin Street, frail and fashionable, was getting it too. Johnny Hanbury-Williams's bedroom was left suspended over a gap of two stories. I do not know if he was in it. Opposite, above the chemist, a girl was blown out of bed, down the stairs or through the window, and she descended unhurt with a mass of glass and rubble, surprised, into the street in her nightgown. She was lovely and completely dazed. A foreign attaché, walking home after dining at one of the Embassies in that pompous part of London, met her, still in her nightgown, her feet bleeding as she stepped blindly over the littered pavement. Aghast, he hurried to help her. "Let me take you home," he said. "Let me carry you—do let me do something——" Out of enormous blue eyes she looked at him. "I don't know where I am going," she said, and went on.

By that time our ceilings, cracked right across, were not to be relied upon, so I persuaded Arthur to use—on occasion—a bed set in the drawing-room. There it stood, incongruous as the packed suitcases ready in the hall and the candle-stumps stuck all over the house.

Ignominiously I descended to the dining-room with my mattress and slept on the floor, with a corner of the big oak-table over my head. It was very silly, because if the house had collapsed the first thing to come down on me would have been Arthur and his satisfactorily solid bed in the corner just above me.

However, it turned out useful, for I was wakened one night by terrific thumping on the front door. Shouts followed and the sound of axes being well and truly used. Up I scrambled and into my dressing-gown, tying it over my chill pyjamas as I felt my way to the door. The light had gone, of course. There had been a big raid on for hours. Firemen were just getting through the front door when I arrived at it. "It's the next house," they said. "Incendiaries," and bolted up our stairs. "Your roof'll go," called the last man. "The fire's got a good hold. You'd better clear out the top floors."

The maids were in the basement, one shivering, the other dreaming, I expect. No use disturbing them! I went upstairs and began to collect my clothes from my bedroom cupboards, shouting to Arthur as I did so. No answer came from his room. That he should sleep through all this bother and disagreeableness irritated me, but, with dresses and coats heaped over my shoulders and my arms full, I pushed open his door and yelled, "Get up. The house is on fire." Leisurely, my husband turned over. A sleepy voice came, "Fire, darling? Are you sure? You do so exaggerate! Well, put it out, put it out." And he went to sleep again.

Later that night we stood, shivering with cold, still in pyjamas, in the middle of the street, our feet mixed up with hose-pipes and unconsidered water spraying us. The next house was well ablaze. From the east end came that steady, tragic glare to which we were accustomed. The blinding white spears of the searchlights met over our heads. We could hear the intermittent drone of German bombers, seeking their target by the bonfires they had made of our houses. Like enormous bumble-bees, heavy with pollen, they seemed to be dropping nearer and nearer. Soon they would brush our roofs while the lights climbed madly—out of reach.

Of course, the bombers were thousands of feet high, but all that autumn, regular as an electric timepiece, from 8 p.m. till dawn—and that is late in a London winter—they droned round and round over the city, still defenceless so far as modern weapons were concerned. We listened to the bombs dropping until we were stupefied by the endless repetition. We counted when there were sticks of them. We told ourselves that particularly loud noises were our own guns. Then one very 'hot' night, at the corner of Great Cumberland Place, the house that had once been Lord Cavan's ceased to exist. The Richard Guinness's came down on top of them, and Zita's description of the catastrophe is as amusing as a Noel Coward play. Lots more happened, including the wrecking of our big house just opposite. It had been

shut since September, 1939, when my husband—still on the reserve of officers—left the City to go back to the army.

For us that was the end of a definite period of living as well as a considerable loss of capital. For we had spent far more than we could afford on that house, and it had tided us over eleven years of conventional social life, making friends, entertaining, growing older and acquiring possessions as well as ideas and habits. Those years had been broken by my constant journeys, but they had been important to us, because they had brought us in touch with so many different kinds of people. Such opposites as Mr. Chamberlain and Edda Ciano, Archie Wavell, Sir Robert Vansittart and the American, Mr. Luce, editor of *Time*, had fed in the Chinese dining-room. With the big house and the wonderful things that Robert Lutyens had designed for it, went my link with the columnists' 'greater' London, perhaps also with Europe. Next day I looked over the remains. The panelling was rent, iron lamps twisted and flung into the street, the famous bronze leopards torn away from the stairs which clung, still solid, to the outer wall. I found three of the beasts, considerably battered, and sent them to the Bahamas, where they now walk round the courtyard within our four-square house, guarded by its pepper-pot towers. But everything else was beyond rescue. It was too misshapen even to recognize.

CHAPTER XXV

1940

'It's All Over Now—So You Must Be All Right.' An End—And Some Beginnings

THAT AUTUMN I travelled round the country a good deal, speaking about the background to the war. I had met the politicians and statesmen, the kings, dictators, financiers and fanatics who, during the last twenty years, had made what Dorothy Thompson calls our 'appointment with destiny'. I knew all the countries Hitler had ravished and those distant lands which he wanted to bring under his dominion. For the Führer had a definite pattern, to which he worked when superstition had no hand in tangling the threads. I could explain the making of to-day and what to-morrow might logically hold—to people in the southern ports on dull grey afternoons before the German bombers came with the twilight, in the industrial towns where factory workers forming their own defence units were, for the first time, drawn into the comity of arms which they had hitherto despised, and in parts of Scotland untouched as yet by the war, to whom grouse and deer were momentous as the panzer divisions. Yet it was in Ayrshire that I heard

a tale representative of village opinion from John o' Groats to Cornwall. A German bomber had been shot down within the policy, I gathered, of Sir John Buchanan-Jardine's Castle Milk. Foresters, guests, gardeners and gamekeepers went out to capture the crew. After the successful accomplishment of their purpose, Princess de Chimay, sister of Lady Jardine, congratulated the ghillie with whom she was walking home. "The Germans will have a bad time if they come up here," she said. "Och aye, my leddy, I dinna doot that," replied the dour, unsmiling retainer, "but we are a' verra worritt in the village aboot the Chairman invasion." Startled, Brenda, whose Belgian husband, educated at Eton and a Captain in the Scots Guards, is now commanding an armoured unit somewhere in the Mediterranean, spoke briskly, "Nonsense, nonsense, I am surc we can deal with them easily." "Och, my leddy, it's no' that! We're a' verra much afraid there'll no' be enough Chairmans to go roond."

In Bristol I saw the B.B.C. under fire. They were as imperturbable as their voices reading the news. I had gone down to rehearse and to act in a little play about my crossing of the Libyan desert in Arab disguise and the discovery of 'holy Kufra'.¹ It was produced to an accompaniment of guns. Bristol was having one of its worst raids. Yet to me it was an experience oddly mixed with amusement. For I went back twenty years as I listened to synthetic Arab voices speaking the exact words of Hassanein Bey and Mohamed or Abdullah in those far-off deserts destined to become so famous during Wavell's and Alexander's campaigns against Rommel. I remembered the agonized apprehension, the excitement, the physical miseries and the delights of what had then seemed such an important venture. In the middle of the war and in a B.B.C. studio, the scale on which our Libyan enterprise had been measured, shrank into smaller proportions. Compared with current events—in which most of us were forced, at times, to play the strangest parts—desert dangers, thirst, hostile tribesmen, a treacherous guide, loss of the way seemed petty as dolls' house furniture. It was as if Ahmed Bey and I had been playing with toys when we should have been grown-up. Yet an excellent B.B.C. actor who nightly regales us—in Oxford accents—with the doom of cities and destruction on the high seas, made my heart ache with his temporary Arabic and his eternal prayer, "There is no God but Allah. And Mohammed is his Prophet."

It happened that I was staying at Dumbleton with the Monsells when Coventry had its great raid. The bombers began to go over as we dressed for dinner. Everything on my enormous oak dressing-table behaved as if it had ague. At dinner, the intermittent drone went on, heavier it seemed to us as succeeding waves of bombers went over our heads. "Whew!" said our host, "that was a big . . ." He caught his youngest daughter's eye. It was stern. "Parakeet," he concluded to

¹ See *Gypsy in the Sun*.

our very great amusement. After that the subject was strictly taboo.

Next day, the countryfolk drove into Coventry—in cars, shooting brakes and trucks—to offer roofs and food. In a street which had ceased to exist, the homeless were gathering up the wreckage of their loves and lives. A woman was seated upon a rubble heap with a child and a kitchen teapot in her arms. That was all she had left. But she would not leave Coventry. "Oh, no," she said. "It would be too dull in the country." Another, asked if she would not let her children go to the safety and the warm welcome of a neighbouring country-house, said, "I would rather keep them with me for company."

Travelling round the country, I saw a good deal of what we all read about in the papers. I could confirm the tales of solid common sense and the extraordinary adaptability of the British. They were at their best that autumn. Of course they were often afraid, but never despairing. Hitler could bemuse them with the turmoil and terror that came out of the sky. Houses fell in heaps. There was little sleep. Transport was interrupted, but it never 'went haywire'. It was astounding how quickly the railwaymen darned the gaping rents in their systems and got 'through traffic' running on time. When London newspapers were late, the country towns knew what had happened. They did not need to listen to Berlin gloating or Rome exaggerating. But the papers always arrived some time and we knew another line had been patched.

I saw bad nights in the big ports and factory towns, but always next day the people shook themselves back into ordinary life exactly as if they were terriers coming out of a pond. Notices in inelegant hand-writing were pinned to the last fragments of shops, 'Business as usual'. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, clerks and typists, hairdressers and counter-assistants came out of shelters or cellars, buffeted by eight hours' successive blitz, witnesses, perhaps, of the most horrible suffering, but quiet, purposeful, unhurried. Carrying the dispatch cases, which often held all they possessed in the world, they crunched through broken glass, climbed over fallen masonry, and when they reached what was left of their businesses, carried on as if nothing had happened.

In Ham, where the common was scarred by bomb-holes and my sister and her soldier husband—in particularly striped pyjamas—had spent the night crawling over their roof putting out incendiaries while their youngest son asserted, "It is very bad of Hitler to make so much noise and keep Timmy awake"—in Ham, I saw a labourer's family poking about in a pathetically small heap. So far, they had rescued a cracked mirror, a child's mug and a chamber pot. "Oh, yes, we had a lot of luck! We're all alive," said the man. Then a smile broke right across his face. "Now— isn't that fortunate? We've got tomorrow's breakfast safe." From under the remains of his kitchen, he had extracted an unbroken bowl with six eggs in it. I wanted then to cry.

Going to Larkhill, near Salisbury Plain, to speak to a Gunner school, I came to a dead end at Reading. "We had a bit o' trouble last night," said the station master. "We're still mopping up the bits. You'd better get a lift by road. There's plenty of trucks going that way——" His attention was claimed by an old lady who had mislaid her umbrella. "Oh, no, Mum," he said soothingly. "It won't have been stolen. Just give me your name and address and I'll have inquiries made. You'll get it back for sure." That man had been up all night. Three people had been killed in his house.

One morning in London our charwoman was late. She apologized profusely, but the cook's manner remained cold. "I wish you'd say something about it, Madam," she said, and to comfort her, for at that time she was trying to feed us all on what a frying-pan and one oil-burner would produce, I made a few polite remarks to the family help. "I am *that* sorry," retorted this remarkable woman, "but they were so aggravating slow when they dug us out this morning." It had not occurred to her that being buried for half the night in a shelter, which received a direct hit, might be sufficient excuse for not arriving on time to clean someone else's basement.

So it went on, and by the time the City of London burned, Arthur and I, shaken out of Chapel Street, were occupying two bachelor 'bed-sits with bath', one on top of another high up over Hanover Square. Mine was just under the roof, and I shall never forget the view I had to the River and St. Paul's. Night after night, I saw the dome stand—the 'rock of ages' and of a people's faith—against the blaze which Italy begged to have 'the honour' of refuelling when Germany had set it well alight.

Then tragedy came to us. One night we dined with my brother and sister-in-law, the Redmond McGraths, at Grosvenor House. It was very gay. The Edens and Diana Cooper were at the next table. She looked lovely, I remember, in a cobweb of black lace. But the person who impressed me most was Gladys McGrath. I thought I had really not known her before.

It was a hideous night. When Arthur and I walked home Park Lane was behaving like the Day of Judgment. It seemed to me the earth was rent and gave up its dead. I disgraced myself by hurrying—on high heels—into a narrower street. My husband would not make this concession to Hitler. He walked straight on. We re-met in what seemed to me the vast, open target of Hyde Park Corner. A taxi-driver, touched by the absurdity of my hat, still the same scarlet feather saucepan, drew up. "Get in, Miss," he said. "I'll take you where you want to go, but get a move on. It's too thick to-night!" "Nonsense," said my husband. "We're just there. You drive if you like. I shall walk." "Your funeral," said the taxi-driver. "So long, lady! I'm hopping it." Off he went.

But all this was later. In the Grosvenor, Redmond gave us a wonder-

ful dinner. Shakes Morrison, then Postmaster-General, came up to talk in that engaging, slow, deep voice of his which is so reassuring, whatever its subject. Gladys was in high spirits. She had the loveliest figure in London and would not admit the war as an excuse for looking one iota less attractive than usual. Her small, proud head was sleekly groomed. She was very witty and made us all laugh. She also—without direct purpose it seemed—made us feel assured and successful and that Hitler was much more noisy than dangerous. "I've been comfortable for too long," she said, "to let that ridiculous little man change my habits. Of course I shall go on sleeping in my own bed. I have had a wonderful life, and if I have to lose it, well, I'll never forget what a good time I've had." She went up then to see that her blue Chow had had his dinner. And she picked her way through the foreign jetsam piled in the hall, afraid to sleep and afraid to leave the assurance of each other's company, with the graceful assurance life had given her. Or perhaps it was a quality born in her, for she was without fear. I admired her very much.

Within a week she was killed by an oil bomb. It broke through the roof of her lovely great house in St. John's Wood where she gave wonderful parties and a great deal of pleasure to her friends of all kinds. She was an excellent friend and a hostess equalled only by the Duchess of Windsor and Lady Willingdon. All three women had, or have, a genius for making their guests welcome.

Gladys was dining in her bed because she had influenza. Redmond was sitting on the end of it, talking. A heavy raid was in progress. Bombs were falling all round. The maid, bringing food, which I am sure was exquisite like everything else in that house, was precipitated through the door by shock or blast. She set the tray down and looked shaken. Gladys laughed at her from the bed. "Well, that was very helpful," she said. "Now you go downstairs to the others. Don't come up again. I've got everything I want."

The next bomb burst in her room. The oil half smothered her. Redmond had his leg caught under a beam, but he managed to free himself after a struggle. When he could get to his wife she was on fire and trying to put out the flames in the bathroom. He beat them out and smashed open the window, calling to chauffeur and butler to fetch a ladder. They put it up and—much to Gladys' indignation—she was lifted out of the window. To the men who carried her down, she said repeatedly, "I wish you wouldn't bother about me. Save my husband—and look for my dog." On a stretcher she asked for a coat, and when one of the men arranged it over her, very carefully for she was terribly burned, she laughed at him and said, "Don't put it so high up round my neck. It can't be becoming like that." At once the man felt much better and managed to persuade himself that the lady couldn't be 'that bad'. But she was and she knew it. In the dressing-station she told the doctor, "I know I am going to die, so

you needn't pretend. Just give me something so that I shan't show I mind." She had been so beautiful. She was—to the very last minute and always—so brave. This is my tribute to her. I wish I had known her better.

Some time that winter my aunt's house at Richmond came to an unexpected end. She was sitting—this very dear and wonderful aunt of mine, who is also my godmother—in the drawing-room having tea with her companion and two Pekinese. It was all very peaceful and orderly—jam sandwiches, I expect, hot scones and cake—except that a fight was going on overhead. German bombers had been intercepted by our fighters. One of the Huns jettisoned his bombs to add to his chances of escape. One fell across the road. Another took away part of the next house. After a third, which must have shaken the tea-table, my aunt said, "I think they are getting rather near. We had better perhaps go down. Will you take Choo-Ki, Miss Thompson?" Picking up the Pekinese which I had given her—a delicious, shy creature, fawn and black, called Mr. Wu—she went into the hall and was half-way down the back stairs when the next bomb came. It threw both women into the basement amidst a mass of dust and rubble. For a minute it looked as if the house was going with them. The walls bulged slowly inwards, hesitated and then straightened. Miss Thompson watched this and lived a few extra years in the process. Then she realized Choo-Ki was no longer in her arms. By the time she had found him again, her employer, undefeated, had found the wood-chopper and was preparing to force a way out. She is well over seventy.

When they were rescued by the A.R.P.—hurriedly because of the plight of the next house, where some had been killed—my aunt was mildly annoyed to find herself torn and smeared. "How are you feeling?" a kindly voice asked. "Miss Thompson, with a twisted ankle, said she was not quite sure. "Nonsense," said my stalwart relation—half Spanish, half Scottish, with the best qualities of both—"it's all over now, so you must be all right."

That was the feeling of the crowds as they emerged after their 'cup o' tea' in the shelters and set off each morning—pleased to find themselves alive—to their 'business as usual'.

CHAPTER XXVI

1941

Canada and America Again

IN JANUARY, 1941, I sailed again for Canada. Transport difficulties were at their height. But I agreed to go back to the Bahamas for a few

months to clear and plant a considerable acreage for Basil Bebb, the War Office Colonel with whom I had listened to Chaliapin while Grosvenor Square lost its symmetry, and for the Monsells who were planning to build a house near us on Eleuthera. Unicorn Cay was finished. Our own land had to be developed. Food—more food from more places—was all the war's work.

In consultation with the Colonial Office, whose amused and on occasions amazing tolerance is both encouraging and salutary, I arranged to plant in accordance with the Empire development schemes then attaining shape. An official, whom I have never seen perturbed and who, I suspect, sees through me as easily as he discerns the intentions of opponents at bridge, provided me with a priority exit permit. It was justified because, had things gone as I planned, I should have been able to plant three big estates and produce considerable tomatoes for export, which means dollar exchange. The permit was in an august name. "Did you ask him?" I murmured. "Not yet," said the official. "I was sure that you two would some time or other have quarrelled, so I thought I might as well save time by taking things for granted."

How right he was! But, in fact, I had an interesting talk with the then Colonial Secretary, Lord Lloyd, before I left England. He had a personality comparable with that of 'F.E.'—Lord Birkenhead—of whom Mr. Churchill said to Redmond McGrath, "You knew him better than I, for you were his greatest friend, but I shall miss him even more than you. For I have always relied on his judgment and I shall never cease to need his advice."

Of Lord Lloyd, as I sat beside his big desk in the Colonial Office, while he talked earnestly of what England must have if she was to hold out against Germany, I remembered the delicious story his wife had told us when she and her sister, my husband and I were on the Atlantic together. At the end of their first year in Bombay, where Lord Lloyd succeeded Lord Willingdon as Governor, she wanted to find out the verdict of average Indian opinion. How did the city merchants react to the changes at Government House? Discreetly, Lady Lloyd made inquiries. The answer was perspicacious and to the point. "Huzoor, the people are so thankful for one thing, they can think of no other." "Oh," said Lady Lloyd, surprised, and before she could ask, "What is it?" her informant explained, "They are so glad that it did not happen his present Excellency was married to Lady Willingdon, for indeed then the combination of their energies would have been too much to bear."

Lord Lloyd told me quite definitely his ideas, and he spoke as a Cabinet Minister. He said in effect, "When you get to the other side, you'll find a lot of sympathy for this country, but a growing feeling also that the war *can not* be won and—among many—the comfortable conviction that it *need not* be won. They want to think Germany has shot

her bolt and can't do any worse. So long as they can persuade themselves that England is safe and getting safer, they won't bother about how much she is battered. You can do useful work by emphasizing, not what we have succeeded in staving off, but our need, literally, of everything. Put it plainly. Say if we are to keep on our feet at all, let alone hold the front line, we must have a lot more. We can't do with what we have got. It is too little. It is too uncertain. It comes too slowly. We *must have* more ships, guns, planes, tanks. We must even have more food. Don't hesitate to say this, straight out. We can hold—we may even win, that is not certain, but I believe, against all reason, that it is possible—if we have enough material. At present we haven't got enough, nothing like enough."

It was another version of Mr. Churchill's epic "Give us the tools and we will use them". I remember the last things the Colonial Secretary said, looking at me hard as if he wondered if I were any good, "You have seen enough of England these last months to be able to put it across. You'll find any number of people who want to believe Germany will break up without any effort of ours. This isn't a pillow-fight. It is going to be a very long war, and unless we can play a much harder part in it, we haven't a chance. That's not what people want to hear, but it's got to be said. Good luck. Don't be afraid of being unpopular." I had no idea how unpopular I would be. For neither the Secretary for the Colonies nor I appreciated the curious atmosphere of Nassau, self-irritant as an ingrown toe-nail. And I had forgotten that Sir Charles Dundas, born of a long line of Scottish landowners, heir to their practical common sense, had gone. He was now in Uganda, a step up in the scale of colonial governorates. H.R.H. the Duke of Windsor had taken his place.

With Judith Listowel, Hungarian-born wife of an Irish Socialist peer, I boarded, at Liverpool, a boat so small that it seemed to me pantomimic. Judith has told, in her excellent account of twenty years on both sides of the fence in Europe, *This I Have Seen*—a book which I would have liked to write myself—how an American at first sight of the *Nerissa*, about the size of a Channel steamer, exclaimed, "Where are the oars?"

Actually, we had quite a good cabin with a bathroom, but it was low down, so we had to keep the solitary port-hole closed, and for a fortnight I felt asphyxiated. Judith, accustomed to Central Europe's sealed windows in winter, preferred the smells of yesterday's cooking, last week's washing and to-day's tobacco to the icy blasts I sometimes let in—surreptitiously—between waves.

For two days we waited in the Mersey, very cramped, for there were nearly two hundred soldiers on board, a bishop or two, some lecturers bound for the U.S.A., including Phyllis Bentley who proved as good company as her novels, the usual experts on missions of—to them—enormous importance, a special gun crew in charge of a new weapon

which Canada was to mass-produce, and a lot of officers. I remember also a delightful sailor, going as Assistant Naval Attaché to our Embassy in Washington, with his wife and family, including, I think, a nurse. It was all very reassuring. Submarines would be out of place—in such familiar and well-established circumstances.

We were bombed for two nights in harbour at Liverpool, or rather the city was bombed while we lay in mid-stream, our riding-lights extinguished. I thought it was most unpleasant. After all, the land is still there—safe and solid—after the worst bomb, but the sea, so to speak, is not—I mean it lets you down, in every sense of the word. The stewardess—last I have seen of that incomparable breed—disagreed. She told us she felt she wasn't doing her bit, when she thought of what her people had to put up with all the time in their home town.

That voyage for me was divided between Judith and the weather. She says we played bridge and had no excitements. That must be because she is a Magyar to whom adventure is the breath of life. Her ancestors had ridden the plains of old Hungary, in their velvets and furs, astride their small shaggy horses, on their way to meet the Turks in hand-to-hand battle. "Hoya! Hoya!" they called to each other—"Hurry, hurry," as they rode for the safety of Christendom, alone against the infidel hordes. That "Hoya, hoy" has been the battle-cry of their civilization ever since, and it has rung with unceasing courage against the enemies of our mutual faith from Genghiz Khan to Bela Kun.

Judith may have played bridge. I had enough to do forgetting to be seasick. I am a bad sailor and it was prodigiously rough. The *Nerissa* had been a fruit boat. She was built for sunshine and calm seas. Grandly she met the breakers of the Northern Atlantic, but they did much what they liked with her. We rolled, we pitched, we bucketed, we began to ask questions about angles and degrees. There was nowhere to sit—except at table, in the bath which always spilled over, or on our bunks. For the small saloon was not crowded but positively *heaped* with long-suffering individuals, and all forward space was sacred to the troops. Some of them had daily lectures on what appeared to be survey or navigation. I hope they profited. If I had tried to persuade a star into an artificial horizon in such a gale, I would have plotted us into mid-Africa.

One day Judith, who is gravely concerned with the world at all times and serious-minded as a result of what life has done to her in spite of her delicate beauty and her charm, decided to take notice of the weather. Fully dressed, I had wound myself into my berth like a cocoon and hoped thus to achieve a certain immobility. My delicious companion, who ate chocolates whenever the cabin was delivered to chaos and slept among piles of books, most of them portentous, was being buffeted about like a humming-bird in a gale. She is so small and so determined that she often reminds me of one of those bright

birds, swift and sure, intended for delight, at the mercy of undisciplined winds. "Sita," she said with the air of forethought she gives to most of her statements, "we have taken on too much—really more than we can stand." She had just bumped her head against one wall, bearing violently down on top of her, and been flung with several suitcases on to the middle of the opposite one.

I agreed. Nothing, I assured her, absolutely nothing, would induce me to venture on to the Atlantic again in mid-winter with less than 30,000 tons of ship underneath me. Thirteen months later I made the crossing on a cargo-tramp about a third the size of the *Nerissa*. How excellent the war is *for us*!

One moment of amazing beauty, I remember. I do not know whereabouts we were or what day it was. Time had all been equally disagreeable. But that morning the sea had calmed down. Instead of outrageous rollers behaving as if we were a hockey ball in the middle of the season's best match, there was a platinum grey swell. We thought it smooth. Muffled to the chin, and wearing, I expect, my Canadian parka, beaver-lined, I came on deck—and gasped. The ship had turned into glass. It was just like one of those glistening white ships in bottles, without any colour at all. The decks were sheeted with ice and every rope frost-coated. The sun was out, the rigging a web of glittering, brilliant silver. No wood or metal was visible. It was all sheathed in blown glass! I had never seen anything like it, or conceived that such brittle beauty could be achieved by a storm. For wherever the spray had driven, there it had frozen, and on the windward side breakers of ice, steel blue, were still held in the position of their last assault. It all melted, of course, and very soon there was only a ship in tears. Salt water dripped and ran from the mast tops to the lowest deck.

That day the Captain came down from the bridge. He had had no sleep since we left the Mersey. Black coffee, he said, had kept him going, but it was not true. He had kept himself going, like his fellows all over the seas which Britain holds open. For he had the indescribable quality which our merchant service shares with the navy. Those men can do without anything except the satisfaction of their own traditional self-respect. No—there is one thing they cannot do, and in this they are as bad as the R.A.F. Not one in a thousand can tell what they have achieved . . . unless it may be in Valhalla.

The *Nerissa* sank with all hands in the spring of the year we sailed on her.

In time—after a long time, it seemed to us—we landed at a Canadian port. It happened there was no crane large enough to unship the pattern gun we carried. This may have added to the confusion which kept us, mixed up with our luggage and the cargo, for most of the day. Judith ate some more chocolates. She also bought silver foxes—on credit and hope. Faint with hunger and seeing nothing, anywhere,

on which civilian life could be sustained, I marched the length of many sheds and so into the troops' canteen. German prisoners were acting as scullery-maids. The tables were heaped with the good things growing scarce in England. A sergeant—surprised—came to meet me. "Do you think I could have just some tea and a piece of bread?" I asked diffidently. "I *am* a soldier's wife . . ." Immediately I was taken into the kitchen, set down at a table and given enough to feed a family. The cook came to talk to me. So did everyone else who could find an excuse. "I never knew an officer's wife to behave like this—so ordinary like," said the sergeant. It was evidently meant as a compliment. For he put another hillock of butter on my plate, and the cook—not to be outdone—produced a new pot of jam, peach from a British Columbia valley. Everybody asked how we were getting on in England, what the blitz was doing to everyday people—housewives and schoolchildren and working-men. I told them as honestly as I could. "It is upsetting production in places, but we have begun to disperse our factories as widely as possible. If one plant is hit, a dozen others will be carrying on, making the same thing." For an hour we talked. I have never had a better time. Customs officers and immigration officials remembered my speeches the previous winter. Their wives, apparently, revelled in *Woman's Own*, a paper for which I have written for three years because the Editor refuses to limit the scope of our countrywomen's interests to the kitchen, the heart, the nursery and the particular bench, desk or implement at which the war has placed them. "We all read your pieces," said a huge man in blue, silver-badged, "and we think you are mostly right, not but what we like arguing in this country. I guess it's our climate. Yours, they say, gets you down. My son is with the First Division. He writes us that he likes the English girls, but he wants his Ma to send him extra thick pants, and he can't raise a good argument nohow. Seems you don't like things getting broke in England."

On the best of terms, we parted. And eventually, escorted by several new friends, Judith and I were in the train. I remember how we relaxed, how comfortable and how steady it seemed to us! At Montreal, James McConnell, owner of the local *Star*, who had just provided a million dollars to buy Spitfires, gave us a Lucullan dinner at the Ritz. We were stuffed as if we were Strasbourg geese. The head-waiter hung over us imploring us to eat just one more spoonful of creamed lobster or a peach stuffed with something delectable and unusual. Friends came to talk to us. They were all working hard for our mutual war. I felt—as usual in Canada—that I had come home. All I had to do was to stretch a bit, to fit the size of the country.

Before we caught the New York train we were interviewed in the left luggage office. We sat on other people's outsize trunks. Porters leaned over us and made suggestions. Earnestly, I repeated exactly what I had been told to say. "Of course England could carry on.

She was planning well ahead. For it would be a long and hard war. This year (1941) we would just have to stick it—taking the worst Germany could hand out. Next year (1942) we might be able to hit back, and by 1943 we ought to get a footing in Europe IF”—I always put that IF in capital letters—“we did not weaken and grow slack. We had got to be prepared for worse things before we could hope for better. We had got to have more of everything.”

Patiently, I reiterated our intentions, which were satisfactory—and our needs, which were desperate.

James McConnell is an obstinate optimist. Consequently his paper, the *Montreal Star*, reproduced what we said, but with laughing snapshots of Judith and me, taken in earlier years, and a headline ‘No need to worry’. This dismayed us both.

There was an amusing incident on the way to New York. We had landed with the usual ten pounds’ worth of dollars, and these were already sadly depleted. What could we do if the U.S.A. Customs demanded duty on Judith’s absurd silver foxes? They seemed to fill the compartment. They refused to look like anything but what they were. “You must manage something, Sita,” said my grave young friend, and retreated, in good order, to talk to the Naval Attaché’s family at the other end of the train. When the Customs official arrived, the first thing he asked—like everybody else—was, “What’s happening your side? I want to get it straight about the bombing—is it as bad as we think? It won’t get you down, will it?” “No,” I said, and asked if he would like to see some photographs of what had been our part of London. “You bet I would,” he said. For half an hour we sat side by side upon Judith’s bed—and her foxes—while the rest of the coach waited. We talked. We looked at pictures. When the man in blue left, he said—with a twinkle and a shrewd glance at those outrageous furs—“I guess you must have something to keep you warm after all that.”

New York was just as kind. It was heaven to be in the Rosens’ house, with no noise at night. For the first time in twenty years I thought of Fifth Avenue as silent. That is what struck me most about the American capital in January, 1941—its blessed silence. I suppose for months, in London or other bombed cities, we had only slept with the top layers of our minds. Things had gone on, full speed and with sound accompaniment, underneath. Now in a panelled Gothic bedroom belonging to some castle from the Middle Ages of Europe, I could sleep in peace till America’s superlative coffee, steaming hot as it rarely is in England, appeared beside me each morning. Not that I was allowed to sleep very much! For all my friends wanted to hear what was really happening in England and how much it mattered. They also wanted to feed me. For they were sure I must be starved.

Felix Rosen took me to dine at No. 21, and although I knew it well,

I could not believe it real. The food was delectable and unusual. So were the new evening hats. They consisted of one enormous flower perched way up on top of the head with yards of veil making nonsense all round. The bright lights outside, the superabundance of everything—including vitality—the way people talked of 'the draft', made me feel as if the clock had been put back two years. America, I thought, was in the state of mind from which we suffered during the year after Munich. Then Czechoslovakia, not Britain, was the victim. Then we hoped to avoid the inevitable war.

Most of the people I met in New York were working hard for the Allies in a generous, individual way. Many wanted to be in the war with us. But these were the cosmopolitans of the East Coast whose windows looked across the Atlantic. They were familiar with Europe. To their habits and surroundings Paris, London and Rome had contributed.

But the vast continent of America, consisting of forty-two states, each with their different interests, some with a strong tincture of Latin, Teuton, Slav or Balkan blood, was still sincerely and seriously determined to keep out of the war. Europe, they said, was no concern of theirs. Many isolated townships preferred not to think about Europe at all. Francis Pratt, the able Secretary of *Foreign Affairs*, told me that the national demand was for speakers on internal problems, industrial, social and cultural.

A very pretty girl with a temperament—who is now, I think, an air photographer and auxiliary pilot in some coastal service—said to me, "We young people think there is a great deal in what Colonel Lindbergh says. He thinks it would be disastrous if either side won in Europe. We feel he is our best chance." "Of what?" I asked. The girl looked even more serious. "Well, it's a matter of our lives," she said. "The draft has shaken us up. We feel we have no future at all."

That conversation depressed me. For in the hands of youth, American, Chinese, Russian and British, is not only the winning of the war, but the making of the peace and the keeping of it. That ought to be enough future for anyone with a sense of responsibility.

An hour later I was dictating a cable by telephone. It was to my husband in England, and it ended with "everybody here very friendly". "I'll say we are!" confirmed the telephone operator. "There's nothing we wouldn't do for you!" We then had a very pleasant conversation in which she told me what she and her boy-friends thought about Hitler. But 'the draft' weighed heavy on her too. She mentioned it as if it were the Day of Judgment.

In the train to Miami I glanced through magazines and journals. The clock was still set back. I might have been reading the comments and the tales we wrote in the summer of '39, or when we believed Hitler 'safe' behind the Siegfried Line. A good many busi-

ness men, seeing I was English, talked to me about production. They were all anxious to send us the weapons with which to defend ourselves. I do not think they visualized the reconquest of Europe as a possibility, but a few did believe—even then—that we held the front line for America. They seemed to me optimistic about the amount of help they had already given us. Some imagined our island already stacked with American munitions and defended by American guns. I said, diffidently, that I thought very little had yet reached us and we needed much more. Then a newspaper man from Chicago expressed the opinion that we had nothing left to defend. London had burned. We were already in bits. "Just before I sailed," I told him, "a naval officer whom I'd known in Nassau turned up in London and asked me to show him what had happened. So I drove him to all the worst holes I knew. He was so surprised to find how small they were in comparison to London that we had to laugh at him. For he sounded disappointed." The newspaper man grunted. I told him then how a Canadian editor had telephoned to me—long distance across the Atlantic.

"You're still alive!" he exclaimed. "Thank God! But is there anything left of London?"

"Everything," I said. "What's the matter?"

"Don't be a fool!" yelled the Editor. "You are ablaze—pall of smoke—ringed with flame . . ." he quoted from a news story.

"Hold on," I said, stupefied, "I'll go up on the roof and see if anything's happening—but I don't think it's worse than usual. I'm just off to a cinema."

"Oh hell," said the Editor, and smacked down the receiver.

CHAPTER XXVII

1941

Robinson Crusoe—Definitely Provincial. The Bahamas

ARRIVING IN NASSAU WAS GREAT FUN. I was glad to see Byrle and Jack Hughes again. They had stored all my furniture for me and shepherded its departure to Eleuthera. They promised to come over and see how it looked in the new house. Byrle, who is a wonderful house-keeper, made me buy all the small, important things I should otherwise have forgotten. They lent me books. They gave me very sound advice and reminded me of the Out-Island 'telephone' which acts as convex and concave mirrors at a fun fair. All that one says in mid-bush arrives in preposterous shape upon the 'mainland'.

It was pleasant staying at the Rozelda where the barman makes the best cocktails in the Caribbean and you can have a flat all to yourself if you want it, looking on to the tops of the palms. I missed the Dundases, of course. They had gone on to Uganda. I hoped the big, friendly crocodile was still ready to gossip on the edge of the lake at Entebbe. Lady Dundas's domestic training centre had been our only hope so far as service was concerned. It had given me, two winters running, the soft-voiced, gentle Delphine who thought me strange but liked me. Sir Charles had consistently cherished the settlers he had persuaded on to Eleuthera for the benefit of villagers and labourers. At times he regarded us with surprise—more rabbits out of a hat! Occasionally he indulged in salutary criticism or reproved impatience. But his suggestions were always constructive and we could rely on his interest and help. If anything went wrong on the farthest Out-Island, the Colonial Secretary of those days, Mr. Jarrett, boarded a schooner, if no plane were available, and went at once to see for himself. So fishermen, farmers, village school teachers, and the new government agriculturists who were to show isolated hamlets what and how to plant, felt they were in close touch with authority in Nassau. They had somebody behind them who was familiar with their difficulties and eager to help. That was Mr. Jarrett's great gift. Arthur and I saw him put new heart into spongers, ruined by the disease which destroyed their crop, into villagers whose corn had been blighted, into seamen whose boats, storm-damaged, represented their living. He was always 'on the spot' when things were going badly. So the Out-Islanders began to feel they were as important to Britain and to their own national government as the seventeen-mile strip of New Providence which, to its politicians, constitutes the whole Bahamas.

I had intended to go straight to Eleuthera, seeing only one or two friends in Nassau. But a message came from Government House and I went there one evening to drink iced tomato juice with H.R.H. the Duke of Windsor and his lovely Duchess. The islanders had given their new Governor a great welcome. That a King should come to rule them seemed to the coloured people a gift straight from heaven. They regarded the Duke with as much reverence as they bestowed upon 'de Lawd', with whom indeed they considered themselves more familiar.

To the Bahamas, accepting perhaps the most difficult of all jobs for an ex-sovereign and a statesman, the Duke came with an interest developed by close examination of island problems. In them, he achieved much of wartime importance. It may be that such importance will stretch into peacetime. For Nassau—and her new flying-fields—may have a place in the air as well as in the sun. But 1943 began the reckless draining of labour for the U.S.A., and Bahaman farms ceased to exist. The bush reclaimed what it had lost. Much else was lost in

the villages, including the present and—possibly—the future. For the wages earned in America were spent on “Co-respondent shoes”, evanescent on out-island rocks, and on suiting delirious in colour as in price. Hunger followed. Too few were left to fish or farm. Thievery became the main business of the stay-at-homes.

Unfortunately no human being can convince the majority of Bahamans of their own best interests. For their travels are limited to a small portion of America—at most. They are imbued with envy, but not with understanding. Millionaires and miracles remain—for them—the most desirable elements in a future of ease, profit and as little work as possible. They cannot yet see beyond the next crop of manna in the shape of some new exploitation, temporary and artificial. Hence the rush to Florida in search of higher wages—and the utter desolation resultant in the Out-Islands.

That evening, drinking my tomato juice in the clever resetting of the Government House rooms which are now singularly charming, the Duke asked for news of his English friends. I could not give much, for, during the blitz, we had been shut, each into a separate compartment, where we worked as necessity demanded and circumstance permitted, glad if for a moment we could look round the corner into somebody else's cubicle.

The Duchess made me feel very welcome. That is one of her gifts. She has remarkable talent for housewifery, as the great ladies of earlier centuries conceived it. Cooking, decorating, flowers, clothes, all come into her ideas of home-making, and are a part of the hospitality for which she has genius. On a later, brief visit to Nassau, I lunched and dined with the Governor and watched the Duchess make a success of two difficult parties. Co-ordinating the ideas of the different guests, she contrived that they should express them with an ease and fluency they did not know they possessed. That day I was reminded of a frantic letter from Aubrey Herbert, who, with Noel Buxton, is said to have ridden across the ancient Balkans with a Turkish guard singing lustily—at the invitation of their honoured guest—“Onward, Christian Soldiers”, while putting an end to any stray Armenians who escaped the quixotic Englishman's attention. “Sita!” ran the letter, “you must lunch with us to-morrow. I've got a mistake coming and only you can make him talk.” The writing, as usual, was almost illegible, but the invitation was irresistible. I don't think I was more than twenty-two at the time. The lunch was delightful. Mary Herbert was a perfect hostess. I sat between Lord Allenby and the newly appointed plenipotentiary of Mustapha Kemal, but I couldn't enjoy either properly because I was searching all the time for the ‘mistake’. Could it be the Frenchman who had helped our host play spillikins with a frontier and a heap of conventions in Asia Minor? Or was it the good-looking administrator just back from Palestine? Conspiratorially, I appealed to Aubrey. “Which is the mistake?” I



1. Riveting operation on a boiler for a 10,000-ton freighter
2. Visit to the Toronto Red Cross. Packing parcels for prisoners of war
3. Inspection bench in a Canadian war plant
4. Girl operating turret lathe in machine-gun plant.

DURING THE WAR CANADA—1942

Photos: *Alexandra Stodd*, *Joan*

- 1 The morning after
- 2 Something left
- 3 Our big house comes down

NIGHTMARE IN 1940



2



Photos
Sport & General

asked, "and what do you want me to do about it?" He looked puzzled. I explained. "Oh, my dear!" he laughed, "I wrote you I had a *nice Turk* coming!"

At Government House we talked about England. With his intimate knowledge of Europe it was impossible for H.R.H. to underrate the gravity of the situation.

The Duchess listened, putting in an occasional apposite comment. She looked very young. I think she is the only woman whom the Bahaman winds cannot dishevel. Her smooth dark head looks as if it had come out of a Persian miniature, where the Princesses are impervious to time and weather. As a Southerner, the Duchess is particularly well adapted to cope with colour problems, and she has definite ideas how to help the Bahamas. Her encouragement of the small shell industry on Eleuthera had already given many of the women a chance of earning a living. For she induced the big stores in America to increase their quota of ornaments made from our sea fruit and dyed by village workers to the clever designs of Caroline Blodgett, Bostonian altruist who for some years had devoted her time and money to starting and expanding the craft.

Both the Governor and the Duchess talked that evening with amused perspicacity of Bahaman complications—human and political—which I doubt if Gabriel and Solomon in partnership could solve. "We Southerners," said the Duchess, laughing, "always flatter ourselves we know best how to deal with coloured people——" Perhaps they do. The Southern States certainly achieved a dignity and spacious grace of living which they maintained through the desperate poverty following Abolition. They were put to all sorts of expedients, but they kept the respect of their own people, who had been their slaves. I loved staying in the 'great houses'—dim and decaying—along the James River. They still held their memories—of the *Mayflower* maybe, of plantation labour bred on the estate, of a leisurely, abundant life and such beauties as Evelyn Byrd, whose ghost haunts the wide, shining, shallow stairs and the polished corridors now belonging to John Crane with a sister once married to the Czech Jan Masaryk.

So many people have written to me and to Colonel Thwaites who runs the Bahama Government Development Board saying that they have read my *Unicorn in the Bahamas* and so want to buy land and farm in the Out-Islands that I think they had better know exactly what would happen to them. I did not—when I built Unicorn Cay.

If you enjoy working—not playing at being Robinson Crusoe with touches of Machiavelli and Florence Nightingale thrown in, then you will probably be content among the startling changes and chances of the Bahamas. But every cultivated idea of what is necessary to the least form of human life must be discarded. If you want to live on an out-island it is essential to forget all that you have been brought up to believe. You must also discount what you have laboriously learned of

life, with all that you hope from your fellow human beings and have hitherto expected and received from your 'betters' in the official rather than the religious sense. Leave all these impedimenta behind with your usual habits and tastes in some bottom drawer in England. Go out—expecting nothing, for you will certainly receive it. Be prepared for the worst. It will probably happen. For on your particular fragment of island you will be alone with the wind and the 'Lawd', the rocks and sand and the bush, your own knowledge of what could be done and the growing realization that it will not be done. On the other hand, there will be moments when you will feel you have never before been alive. Perhaps if you are of the right quality and if you can forget such terms as progress and responsibility, these may come more and more frequently. You will forget agricultural ambitions and that deep-planted British desire to interfere and improve wherever it is possible—or impossible—and you will be happy. You will also be uncomfortable and you will not have enough to eat. But that does not really matter.

On a satin-smooth day, with the sea streaked as a bed of delphiniums, R.T. took me to Unicorn Cay. My own truck—ordered the previous year, and driven for his own illicit purposes most recklessly and enjoyably all over the island by my then head-man, so that all which could be broken was already in bits—I should say perhaps what remained of my truck, met us on the quay. Boldly R.T. drove it and me and an astounding variety of baggage along the track with which the Government thought they had wiped out any obligation to new settlers. It was—and is, if it still exists at all—a surprising piece of work, except where R.T., generously coming to the rescue, made the two worst sections passable at a later date. Bumped, bruised, battered, thrown from hillock to hole, but with my excitement undiminished, I arrived in front of my own new door. That was a moment holding nothing but happiness. For the house was perfect.

It is impossible to describe the delight with which I hurried from one room to another, finding each exactly as I had planned, but better-looking than I had expected. For ever, I shall be grateful for those minutes when I felt like God on the last day of Creation. The rest of the day was given to work of the most back-breaking kind, for the big living-room—which had turned out just as I imagined it when I allowed myself to be outrageously hopeful—was piled head high and higher with furniture. Unopened cases contained curtains and cutlery and cooking-pots, but we did not know which. I do not remember lunch. Perhaps there was not any. But by dusk some semblance of order had come to one or two rooms. R.T. had worked like a whole labour battalion. At one moment, having put up and put together an inordinate number of objects, he did say, "Let's go look at the oranges." But I was stern—and haggard and hot and streaked with dirt, sand, dust, sweat. . . .

"We must just do this," I begged, "and that", of course, "and this

other", until it was too late to see anything at all. I do not know if it was that day or the next on which I found my incredibly good-natured friend, without whose help I could never have established myself at Unicorn Cay, regulating the vagaries of a curtain railway.

Half of it was functioning, but in the wrong direction. Half of it was in bits on the floor. Two hot and bothered gardeners were adding, I thought, to the mess. "Wouldn't it be better if they didn't undo so much—before putting it together again, I mean." R.T. did not even turn to look, but the expression of his shoulders was sufficiently baleful. "No, it would *not*," he said.

That night we could not find even a kettle. We had a cook—my beloved Delphine who had come with us from Nassau—and plenty to cook. For I had purchased whole shelves of groceries. The enterprising and most kindly Americans at Hatchet Bay had brought over a complete truckful of 'essentials'—including olives, cocktail cherries and a vast variety of relishes, and R.T. had sensibly provided what we really did need. We had a wonderful stream-lined stove from the U.S.A. where housewives are particular, two huge refrigerators and all sorts of other modernistic apparatus dependent on bottled gas—but we had nothing to cook *in*! There were plenty of pots and pans somewhere, but they did not happen to be in any of the cases we opened. A staggering erection of boxes still towered towards the ceiling. "Where do you think the darned things have gotten themselves?" asked R.T.

Silently I crept away. Too exhausted to be hungry any more, I laid myself upon the first bed I met. To-morrow, I supposed, would come. What would happen on it, I no longer cared.

Hours later, it seemed, when the energetic coloured electrician we had brought over with us had induced a surprising number of lights to function, Delphine came to me with her high-stepping, deer-like grace. "Mr. Symonette done cook supper, Ma-arm."

"What in?" I asked.

"I don' think he had nothin', Ma-arm, but it looks mighty good."

It was.

After that extraordinary day, when I understood the feelings of Moses before he struck the rock, life behaved like a kangaroo. Everything got done in bounds. One hour it seemed there was no water at all. The pump run by an oil-engine had struck work, or the perpetual wind had veered into the one quarter where it was no good to the latest skeleton steel mill. During the next, there was such a rush that the huge cedar tanks in the towers overflowed and rivulets poured across the terrace, threatening to take with them the newly planted grass. In the middle of the turmoil, when Delphine was saying, "I don' know how I can train dis house-boy. He don' know a broom from a teaspoon" and my 'housemaid'—male—was dreamily pushing a floor-polisher well up against the newly painted white walls,

so that they immediately became toffee-brown to match his own skin, Mr. Shurey's governess telegraphed that she was arriving with his two children.

A gentle voice was murmuring, "Truf is, Ma-arm, I don' like work-in' so hard. I only like workin' a little jes so's to cat. I don' have any ambition, Ma-arm," as I set off for the Shurey house still packed in its wrapping-papers. For yet another day we pushed and pulled and sorted, we made beds and put up curtain-poles, we argued with keys and cupboard doors, we arranged implements and condiments. Then we stood back—grimed and aching—and thought how much Mr. Shurey's governess would enjoy it. She did not—poor woman! Very naturally she much preferred comfort and security at Nassau. Eleuthera seemed to her unrelenting savagery, and she was terrified of the berry-brown gardeners, suspecting them of worse than their limited imaginations could conceive. Her charges were delightful, but like so many modern children they were used to company. They missed it in Eden. Mr. Shurey's governess stood it for three days. She locked herself in at nights and locked herself out—with the utmost relief—when something mysterious happened to the well. A clogged pipe put an end to the water-supply. 'Proc', who had lots of good qualities but not those suited to Eleuthera, returned to Nassau. She begged me to go on looking after her employer's orange-trees and grass. But she really thought things grew of their own good intentions, and was appalled at the amount I planted. That is where one comes one's first cropper—in financial calculations, I mean. For in war-time England, most carefully with blue pencil and red, with lined foolscap, strong coffee and cold compresses, one works out what it will cost to build a house and furnish it. But the house—however satisfactory—is only an egg without its shell, and not even a hard-boiled egg! For land has to be cleared, crab-grass planted—and replanted if drought prevents its rooting. Wind-breaks have to be created—which means literally hundreds of trees massed in the path of the prevailing trades. Budded citrus—orange, lemon, tangerine and grapefruit—must be imported from Florida, planted in four foot deep holes dynamited out of rock, subsequently watered, fertilized, pruned and sprayed.

If the house is not to look like a pimple on a bald head, a garden must be created. The nearest provider of cuttings is Mr. Levy's excellent nursery at Hatchet Bay, but that is some twenty-five miles away over a 'road' so atrocious that the Americans very wisely will not acknowledge its existence. On it the hardest trucks break down, springs burst, tyres and inner tubes go to pieces. That road is the assassin of all reasonable enterprise in Central Eleuthera. Ours was unreasonable and so it succeeded to a certain extent—in spite of sense and sinews.

I stayed at Unicorn Cay for eight months, with only one flying visit to Nassau to have a tooth out, and—I hoped—to get implemented the

last Colonial Secretary's official promise of 'a public road to be maintained for public use' by the Government. In that main objective I was singularly unsuccessful. Mr. Jarrett's successor adored correspondence. He only felt safe when he had things in 'writing'. Mine, I am told, is unrecadable. But we both persisted. Judging by the size of the files thus produced, Mr. Heape's security must have been absolute.

In vain I sent him a copy of his predecessor's official assurance on which I had bought land for various friends as well as for ourselves. Mr. Heape was unimpressed. He is, I understand, inclined to the left, so he ought to approve of 'security' provided by the maximum of Government assistance and the minimum of individual initiative. But, with the help of the Attorney-General, Mr. Hallinan—a very charming person, not devoid of guile—he informed me of four things. One—the last Colonial Secretary had no right to promise maintenance of a road—even to ensure much building and open a large area for agriculture. Two—it was impossible to maintain that which did not exist. Three—the official statement that a 'public road' existed and would be maintained—through the property sold to me by the Crown—was in the nature of a warning, not a promise. Four—a 'road' was not necessarily more than a path, and 'public use' might be confined to feet!

It was just like Alice in the Looking-Glass. I forget what the Red Queen said, but she was as surprising. Stupefied, I returned to Eleuthera.

There all sorts of things happened. Without the promised road I could not plant on the scale I had intended. For no ordinary farmer or settler has either the money, the machinery, or sufficient familiarity with dynamite to break the growth of centuries riveted in rock. But, gradually, I made a garden, full of bright flowers and flowering-trees. I persuaded Mr. Warner, the American expert at Hatchet Bay, to risk a truck across the holocaust of hummock and pothole, both equally sharp, which separated us. So I got crotons, hibiscus and lovely oleanders. Captain Willie Brown Johnson, whom we still called 'Winston', sailed across with a shipload of trees and bushes from the Government nursery gardens in Nassau. Then I had jacaranda, pride of Barbadoes, cassia, bohenia, gardenias and all sorts of other lovelies. I did not know the names of most. With the citrus—chiefly new navel oranges—from Winter Haven in Florida came crêpe myrtle; Judas-trees, magnolias and azaleas—the latter a ridiculous experiment because they like shade and an acid soil. Still, it was great fun visualizing what the garden would look like in three years. Really, of course, if half what I planted had grown, it would have been a jungle, impenetrable as the bush we had cleared to make room for it.

We did the most absurd things, moving gigantic century-plants from their own familiar sandhills and huge-leaved palmetto from the

bogs they enjoyed, to the aridity of our valley. With slow dignity, they died. Those expensive plants which did not arrange their own obsequies, we carefully killed by using cave-earth, which is bats' dung—on village advice—instead of fertilizer. The result, if unexpected, was quick. We tried again—and in time things did begin to grow.

R.T., who brought to visit us delightful American friends—the girls much prettier than my rarest hibiscus—used to look at acacias ruffling well overhead and murmur, “I thought only God could make a tree—but those really are the seeds I planted nine months ago.” Generally, when such trees were at their best, we dug them up and put them somewhere else. They died. Sometimes, after we had given up all hope, they came to life again. Then we watched and worshipped.

A passion-flower, planted in the courtyard, rushed up its wall averaging ten inches a day. When it reached the roof, it celebrated by bursting into bloom. This was most encouraging except that it turned out *not* to be a passion flower at all. Outrageously, it had decided to be a Mexican love vine. There was nothing we could do about it.

One morning very early, while I was still asleep, the voice of Ira Knowles, my head gardener, murmured—urgently—at the window, “Please will you get up, Madam. For Bullard has cut his head off.” “What!” I gasped. “Right off?” feeling that in face of such finality it was hardly worth while to get up. Imagining what Bullard must look like, I thought I could bear it better lying down. “Well, mostly off, he says, but he’s holding it on and won’t let us look.”

Wan and breakfastless, wrapped in flowered cotton, I hurried out. It could *not* be as bad, I assured myself, as the least of what I had seen in the blitz. For once I was right. Our nice, deep coffee-coloured gardener, with hands like friendly bumble-bees, had been walking along with an axe over his shoulder, the blade upwards—with true Bahaman faith in not being able to die till the Lawd so decided. He had stumbled. The blade had followed its natural course—well in behind his ear.

Bullard reasonably determined he would hold on till he knew the worst. He was still doing so when I got him into a bathroom, and he would *not* let go till, with the help of two mirrors, I showed him the side of his head. It was still there.

“I mos’ thought I’d lost it,” he said, cheerfully, while I swabbed and stitched. All the rest of the day he worked, disdaining even a headache. “It done feeling a bit sore,” he said as he prepared to walk the usual three miles home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

1941

'Impressed and Appalled.' Cultivating Eleuthera

THE NICEST THING on Eleuthera that year was Mrs. Edward Meade, and the island owes me a lot because it was while she and her husband were staying with me at Unicorn Cay, that she fell in love with the lakes, the odd little rolling hills and the wild rush of palmetto looking at themselves in the sea. Immediately she said she must have some land and build a house.

She agreed with me that Eleuthera had come straight out of Eden. It was really the first morning of the world, rinsed and scrubbed, hung out in the sun to dry. When the most surprising things went wrong—with the finality only achieved on a jungle isle where Providence or ignorance must take the place of modern mechanical service—she used to say, "It must have been just as tiresome in Eden. After all, the Adams couldn't have had any servants——"

I think Bee Meade is one of the most remarkable women I have ever met—which is a tribute to America, from which she came. Her heart is of the proverbial gold, but mixed, certainly, with warmer material. She has every kind of sense, including humour. Nothing disturbs her. She can be surrounded by the utmost exasperation without being affected by it. At any conference between Giraud and de Gaulle, for instance, she would, I am sure, have been invaluable. For she has a most comforting faith in everybody's sincerity. Each of those much harassed Generals, fiercely determined to save France in his own—and nobody else's—way, would have been forced to accept a generous—and probably also a correct—appreciation of the other's intentions.

So Eleuthera and I have benefited, for Bee, while she acknowledges difficulties, is never defeated by them. And she loves the striped seas and the 'liquid light' in which the beaches lie, naked as the pearl-pale flesh of the first woman, Lilith, mother of life.

When she stayed with me, chaos rioted inside the house and out. Delphine had been dragged back to Nassau by a husband who—reasonably—said he had married the nicest girl he knew for his own benefit not for mine. Subsequently, village women of all shapes and much bulk flowed through Unicorn Cay, doing a certain amount of damage on their way. Few stayed more than a couple of days. It depended entirely on their curiosity. When they had satisfied it, they told me, "I guess my husban' can work for us both. I'm goin' home to look after ma' pig." Children apparently did not require attention. Rows

of them accompanied their parent and sat upon the porch steps, mouths open like young birds.

At times a pregnant hippopotamus rolled about the house, at others a figure, slight and insubstantial as the 'haunts' of which the labourers were terrified after dusk, brought my morning coffee. But at last Malvina took charge. She could not read. She could cook very little except crab gumbo. But she had a wide, kindly smile and some instincts left over from the old days when her great-grandmother was Mammy to a Loyalist settler's family.

While Malvina quarrelled at length with an obstinate and intensely religious houseboy who longed to save our souls but was not interested in our dishes, every outdoor man had to help clear the wreckage left by the builders. For a bewildering distance around the house and the beginnings of a garden which R.T. had most generously made, stretched what seemed to my overworked spirit the results of an earthquake in a city refuse dump. Apart from the lavish discards—wood, metal, plaster, stone, tools, forms, receptacles—which one might expect of Olympians trained to destruction, we found the whole history of the men's lives and habits. They had even left trousers and a stray jersey or two. They had strewn boxes, tins, netting, wire, beams, paper enough to run the *New York Times* for a week of Sunday supplements, enormous casts and blocks and canisters, just off the edge of R.T.'s grass. His cabbages were nurtured on rags and the most intimate accessories of toilet. His best palms were confused with material the builders had mislaid. Augcan stables would have been spotless as an A.T.S. kitchen twenty minutes after any meal, compared to the task we faced.

In the middle of it, Edward and Bee Meade arrived. Immediately, life seemed much less difficult. He is a brother of Lord Clanwilliam and was a page to Queen Victoria. He owns the most lovely Inigo Jones house in Northamptonshire with grounds reminiscent of the Trianon, so he would have every right to want something more settled and certain than Eleuthera. But he possesses that rare quality of intelligence wisely founded on adaptability. So when his bed fell down with him in it and the ceiling followed, he remained quite calm, merely changing his position so that he could read comfortably—at a peculiar angle and under a portion of roof which still had some self-respect and 'kept itself to itself'.

I had heard the crash, but lately there had been so many ominous sounds, mostly concerned with the violently good intentions of Malvina, or the tanks—which overflowed whenever we did not need water, and ill-naturedly refused to help when the garden thirsted and we all obviously required scrubbing—that I felt I could not face the results of any more misdirected activity. With comfortable cowardice I remained in bed. It is odd how soon Eleuthera reduces one to a condition in which almost every happening seems easiest dealt with in a position recumbent and as distant as possible from the actual scene of disaster.

Next month the Meades took a cottage in Governor's Harbour. I do not think it would have seemed comfortable even to the Swiss Family Robinson whom, as children, we detested because our governess always held them up to us as examples. But Edward and Bee bought an enormous refrigerator to remind them of civilization and lived by the sun. At that time they were looking for land. This is a life work. We all started with the best intentions and unblemished tempers. Our principles were then rigid as telephone poles. Gradually they more nearly resembled cooked macaroni.

The Meades wanted a moderate acreage with a beach and some decent soil for agriculture. On behalf of my friends, the Monsells and the Bebbs, I was a trifle more ambitious, but still reasonable. So I thought! I wanted a couple of hill-sites for building, with views over contiguous beaches and a hundred or two acres of brown soil for citrus and tomatoes. But I wanted these things in one piece and with a clear title. Such was my ignorance and my optimism that I worked for months to get them.

Eleuthera must have enjoyed the joke. The island has since played it on several unsuspecting newcomers. Even R.T., intending to provide the people who now constantly want him to build houses on 'our island', with land on which to put their dwellings, has been left struggling in a maze of family trees and titles to which the complications of the Old Testament are simple as the Pons Asinorum in my childhood's arithmetic.

In the Bahamas most land is owned in common by a whole family. After several generations, it becomes therefore the joint possession of some hundred people. No one of them can sell without permission of all the others, of their heirs wherever they may be—in Europe or America, in prison or at school—and of their wives, separated, divorced or present—and argumentative—on the spot.

After seven months of struggle for Lord Monsell, with his house plans ready and clearing already begun, it was discovered by Mr. Toote, our able lawyer—who disentangled controversial testaments and a multiplicity of widows, all with highly decorated marriage certificates, much as a spinster deals with her knitting—that one of the supposed owners had never proved his father's will. Inevitably he was in another continent. Two wives claimed right of dower. Two villages were divided as to whether they had ever been married. The oldest inhabitant 'seemed to remember' going to a wedding, but he could not remember whose! Stimulated by a loan of two acres on which to grow mealies and by a four-mile drive in my truck, whose front seat, he said, was just what he wanted for a coffin, 'convenient like and not too hard on the bones', he deposed to our satisfaction and that of the local magistrate. Subsequently he said he had 'gotten mixed' between two men of the same name. Next week he remembered a third, and thought this would have been the heir if he were alive, but he had gone

to 'Australy' where they walked on their heads like flies, 'being as the earth there is upside down'.

For Colonel Bebb, I had planned perfection—an estate from sea to sea with the loveliest hills looking over two lakes. I shall never forget the day I insisted on walking from boundary to boundary of what I sought to buy. I knew it was a patchwork of small holdings, in parts untrodden, but I had no conception of the worst Bahaman bush could do. Dragged ahead by one of the delightful Bethel farmers, Scelathiel and Hermann, who became great friends of mine, pushed by one of my own men, encouraged by Luther Stirrup, another ally from Governor's Harbour, I scrambled over the sort of upheaval one imagines in the Book of Revelations. Only the Bible, I find, provides sufficient range of description for what happens on Eleuthera.

Pits loomed under our feet. In them we could all have disappeared for ever. Luther hung on to me as if I were the Queen in the three-card trick. The Bethels climbed trees to see how much we had lost—of our way and ourselves. They all kept their tempers. I was impressed and appalled. For the villagers called this chaos of rock and virgin bush 'good land' because brown soil was pocketed among the stone they blast to get sufficient depth for fruit trees or any perennial crop. They wanted five pounds an acre; they would be hurt by the acceptance of three for jungle-smothered heaps of rock like a cemetery on the Day of Judgment.

Battered, torn, panting, we arrived at last on the cleared hillock I was buying for Colonel Bebb. In silence I looked back—and down—upon the 'estate' I had planned. "The Colonel could make a road from his beach and that valley there, where there is good soil for his citrus——" suggested the indomitable Hermann Bethel, with his unexpected smile. "Only God could make that road," said Luther with sound sense. "He'd need all the archangels and Sir Harry's machines from Nassau to get it started—and I doubt if it'd be ready before we're buried," he added thoughtfully while he unwrapped the delicious cake and the tea with lots of sugar which he had had the forethought to bring.

"Oh, Luther, how heavenly! I don't believe I could have gone on without food," I said, and—for the first time—looked south. The view was worth all our tatters. Below us, just across the preposterous main road—which is not even as a darn between the holes of war-couponed stockings—lay Great Oyster Pond. It is full of islets and looks like something out of Africa. It is quite different from the rest of Eleuthera—more exaggeratedly decorative. Glowing green hills, bush-covered, of course, but in the distance smooth as plush and highly ornamental, separated lake and sea. Northwards, by our *via dolorosa*, the earth tumbled to Carey's Pond, brown as a Scottish burn in spate, and the palmettos hurrying over their sand hummocks to the streaked seas.

It was far lovelier than I can describe, and I would have given some

years of living to possess it. Land-greed must be in my bones. But arithmetic is not. "Sit down here," I said to the Bethel brothers, "and tell me which of these hill-tops I can buy." There followed then one of those Rabbinical conversations about A, the son of B, the son of C, and so on until I was lost in the confusion of generations. "Let us take one piece of land at a time," I suggested, hot, tired and bothered, but still trying my best. "How many acres is that and who does it belong to?"

I pointed to a scrap of bush untrodden, I thought, since the days of Puritan William Sayle, who first colonized Eleuthera, in tall hat and tight trousers, the Bible in one hand and a mattock in the other.

"Quite simple," they said. "Three or four acres it must be and owned by not more than five people." There was (let us say) Nehemiah, but he had given his title to a grocer in Nassau as security for a bill he couldn't pay. There was Alexander, but he was dead and his widow a 'simple' who couldn't understand business, so her rights would be looked after by a lawyer. "Where?" I asked. "Maybe in Nassau—or somewhere in Ameriky, because her son was there, and he would be the heir, of course, if he was begotten by the second husband, but maybe he belonged to the first, and there was some doubt if she was married at all."

Weakly, I asked about the other three owners. One was a child at school and nobody knew his guardian. "Anyway, neither a minor nor a guardian can sell safe like——" said one of the Bethels. Another was a sailor, 'anyway in the Caribbean', or perhaps in a Central American prison, for there were rumours that he had 'gone bad'. Of the fifth heir nothing was known except that he had last been heard of in Florida, where it was thought his wife had subsidized his drinking himself into a happy loss of wits by buying all his inherited rights.

"I think we had better go home," I said.

It is, I feel, to my credit that—during a whole eight months of this sort of thing, with only Luther Stirrup and the Bethels making sense at all—I did not myself take to drink! For rum is one of the few spiritual consolations of the Out-Islands. It is potent, and nothing can be more encouraging than its combination with fresh grapefruit juice and limes picked from one's own trees.

Eventually Lord Monsell's property was shaped into reasonable security—with the help of the invaluable Mr. Toote—while another Nassau lawyer, with a most refreshing appreciation of the gap between incidents and events, helped me extend the Bebb property—in patches—from sea to sea. Regrettably, we looked at the blanks on the map drawn by Mr. Cox, Assistant Crown Surveyor and always most helpful. "Should you not try to fill in those——" suggested Mr. Adderley with an eye to symmetry. "Euclid could not do it," I retorted, and added a description which, I felt, would have done justice to Conrad.

Mr. Adderley laughed and achieved most of what I thought was

impossible, without losing his sense of humour. My acquaintance with these two men was one of the nice things that happened to me in Nassau. For the Tootes, who loved gardening, took me to buy rare palms and plants with names I had never heard. After solacing me with tea in their delightful house, with all the things I most wanted growing on the porches, they guided me through some new nursery gardens and prevented me buying what would certainly not have grown under my insistent but ignorant ministrations. To them I owe a lot of my garden—the part that does grow.

CHAPTER XXIX

1941

American 'Virginia' Concerned With Her Future. Eleuthera With the Past

ANOTHER NICE THING that happened to me was the arrival of Virginia Taylor. She is young, talented, impetuous and American—from New Orleans—with the perfection of body that seems only to exist in the States. It was a delight to look at her when, stretched to full length and tilted a little backwards, she leaned against the huge old ship's beam constituting the mantelpiece in the living-room—to the peril of my jades. She stayed with me for some weeks and worshipped the sun and was fretted by the wind and talked to me, at length, about America's 'lost generation'. Again the clock was turned back, for in Europe the term was old-fashioned. The youth of Czechoslovakia and Poland, of Greece and Britain and Spain had found something for which it was worth while to die. I do not think they needed to *find* it. For it was a case of sudden and whole-hearted recognition. It came to us at Dunkirk. The navy and the merchant service had known it since the previous September.

"We feel," said Virginia firmly, "as if we could count on nothing. We've been trained to believe war is just destructive. It is against all our education and culture. Nothing good can come out of a war. Look how we Americans were let down after the last. I don't mean about the debts, but Wilson didn't get anything he wanted for Europe."

I thought the last sentence was interesting. It expresses the feelings of many Americans. They believe that their President saw—with the perception of the unbiased onlooker, coming from a distance—the needs of Europe, more clearly than Clemenceau and Lloyd George. "If he had got the frontiers he wanted for all those small states,

Hungary and Bulgaria would not have been so crippled, nor Roumania so bloated!" Virginia enjoyed words. She said, "Ever since I've been grown up, I've known there must be war, but why should we be in it? It's your fault, not ours. Our President tried to make a reasonable treaty which would have contented even the enemy countries, but you wouldn't have it. Your politicians were too clever for him. We cleared out of Europe because we knew no League of Nations could make those Treaties work. They were too short-sighted. Countries were cut to bits, towns deprived of their food, farms of their markets, industries of their raw material, peoples were muddled up anyhow and called minorities, ports and seaboard shut away from the nations who used them. Oh, Sita, how could it work? What was the use of America coming in on such a bad job?"

Startled, I could only say, "Well, that's one way of looking at it."

Earnestly, Virginia insisted, "That's the way all we young Americans look at it."

It struck me again how accustomed the people of her great country are to dividing themselves into collections—the middle-aged, the young, the club women, Wall Street, the Middle West, the intellectuals, the isolationists, the miners, the farmers, the army or the navy. We may think of other people like this, but each of us thinks of himself or herself as different and alone.

Once, when Virginia was talking of war as a crime, I argued with her. "That I think is a generic description due to our natural desire for survival, but I don't believe it is correct. It is, of course, a crime to make it, without right cause, but to fight it when necessary is obviously a supreme virtue. I suspect that war is good for all of us. It puts an end to laziness, greed, inertia, selfishness and cowardice—at least it ought to! It gives us a chance to do what we should never have the heart to attempt in peace. I don't see that life can ever be worth living unless, at heart, you know there are certain things for which you'd die. When a nation has nothing of this kind, then of course it deteriorates. We got soft and silly just because we tried to pretend to ourselves that life is the most important thing we possess."

"It is," said Virginia.

"How can it be," I retorted, "unless it has some belief. And for that belief, if it is really important to you, you would have to die."

"What would you die for?" asked my American friend. By this time we were both in that discomfiting state when we had to be honest or—in our own eyes—disgraced. So I thought very carefully. "I would die for two people, possibly three," I said. "My husband and my mother, of course, and I think my sister. But that's obvious and stupid, for anyone when it comes to the actual moment will die for all sorts of people, even strangers. One saw it all the time in London in the blitz. I don't believe it's even courage. It's a conviction and a habit. People do it instinctively without thinking, or if they

do think—they do it crossly and regretfully, but they do it just the same.”

I remembered my fury and bitter disgust when a child fell off a wall on to a very slippery road in front of a huge Packard I was once driving. There was no possibility of braking on the frozen surface. All I could do was to turn the car over an embankment on my left. In that second I was crosser than I have ever been before or since! It seemed to me outrageous that I should have to risk a life which I enjoyed and at that time mistakenly felt held promise, for a sickly scrap of humanity which would probably not live to grow up. Providence evidently sympathized, for the car hung, miraculously straddled over a parapet, the railway below, while—somewhat bumped—I got out.

“What else?” asked Virginia, bent on vivisection. I was not going to give in. “I wouldn’t lose a hair for political England,” I said, “or for the people who with their pretences and compromises and cowardices brought us into discredit all over the earth. But I would die for the ordinary England whose people are so heartrendingly splendid in deed and so often quite maddening in their ideas—which, of course, aren’t really their own ideas at all. And I think I’d have a shot at dying for my conception of Christianity, but I’d probably make a mess of it. It would depend on how angry I was. Don’t you agree it would be quite easy to die if one were sufficiently furious?”

“No,” said Virginia, and meant it. She also gave way to much probing of conscience. “I think all you’ve said is nonsense,” she concluded. “For as long as you have life you have a chance of doing things. You are useless when you are dead. Nothing justifies you throwing away your opportunities. It’s waste of your own soul.”

This conversation took place on one of those fiendish days which the Caribbean is expert at producing. The wind was outrageous. Sea and sky met, evidently loathing each other. The whole house shook. Every shutter went mad. My newly planted palms, for which I had names, so that they seemed to me diverse in character and exasperatingly human, committed suicide. If possible they fell upon their rarest neighbours and killed them too. No doubt it was the endless noise and the shaking which made us so portentous. I felt much sympathy for Noah. The animals probably talked as self-consciously, two by two, whenever there was a gale.

Other charming people came over from the States—and on to see me, by plane or in anything that sailed. Most of them were brought by R.T., who has a genius for friendship. There was Marion Dreyer Udell from Chicago, with a mind as attractive as her face. She wanted to live on Eleuthera altogether, but her husband felt there might—perhaps—be other places with more possibilities of ‘getting about’. I find my American friends like ‘getting about’, whereas after twenty years of doing this, I really prefer staying put. “You

settle on houses like a butterfly on a flower, and are as immediately at home," writes Constance Holt, a delightful person with a brain like a scalpel. She can dissect anything and most successfully put it together again so that it looks nicer than before.

There was also—for a very happy afternoon, spent on the beach—Kay Robertson, fashioned like Eve, but with wits as well as charm. She also liked 'getting about'. I was reminded of a delightful old lady in Idaho with whom I stayed while lecturing. At breakfast next morning she said, "Let's get in the car and go places." "Where?" I gasped, for she was near seventy. "You ought to see the coast," she retorted, "and we've a whole long week-end." With the greatest difficulty I dissuaded her from setting out, with one grip, for California, just as if it were the nearest store.

Kay is now in England at an American aerodrome. She looks wonderful in her Red Cross uniform which fits like her own good temper.

One morning, when at 6 a.m. I was drinking Malvina's good coffee in bed, Bullard—his head healed in spite of my doctoring—hurried up from Governor's Harbour with a telegram whose contents had delighted and flustered the whole village. For very often at Unicorn Cay one receives a wire with considerable local advice attached, such as, "Will arrive to-morrow by boat," and scribbled on the back, "Not possible, mail steamer delayed. Mr. Bethel's young George could pick up at Hatchet Bay if you like."

The telegram Bullard brought—with conscious pride—was from the Duchess of Windsor suggesting a visit on the following day. Governor's Harbour had already decided exactly what must be done. It is surprising that they had not dispatched—on my behalf—a suitable reply. Bullard breathed heavily outside the window while I wrote one—and a note to the Meades, "There is one pork chop in the refrigerator. Can you do anything?" Bee replied, "It is all right. I have a chicken and a half. I'll come and cook them for you."

What fun we had next day. Only Edward, with his memories of the Victorian Court, was troubled by our unseemly lack of red carpet. We did our best to make up for it. Ira Knowles, I believe, walked round every flower in the garden, personally admonishing it. Half the population of North Palmetto Point arrived, carrying—on hangers—its best clothes, freshly laundered. Alexander Culmer would hardly consent to clip the courtyard grass for fear of getting hot, and thus not being able to do justice to his metamorphosis into white linen and butlerdom. Young women who had hitherto differentiated sharply between 'work' and a 'good time', insisted on being auxiliary housemaids. The village beauty, who had been 'saved' after an all-night session of the local revivalists, walked several miles to offer her services. Unanimously, my household refused them.

It happened that R.T., who had recently bought land about six miles

away after a struggle à outrance with its owners, heirs and widows, and was creating a farm with the vigour he had hitherto applied to his hotels, his shipyard and his houses, was visiting his new property. From this havoc of bush and rock—later an admirably organized and productive estate which could have supplied badly needed fresh food to the neighbourhood, but for the flight of labour to U.S.A.—he came post-haste, with a yard of steak. He also brought a generous supply of delicacies in cans. Awed, I read what had to be done to them before they reached the table.

R.T. said he would cook the dinner. So did Bee. I left them both in the kitchen with an admiring and harassed Malvina and several volunteers from the village. Fortunately there were two stoves. Across the courtyard—at intervals—drifted rival courtesies, "Of course, Mr. Symonette, you are a wonderful cook. I always remember that lobster of yours. But I wonder if perhaps just a pinch of . . ." Then there would come R.T.'s firm tones, "You know a lot about the job yourself, Mrs. Meade. Those peas, now, look fine, though perhaps they'd be the better for a . . ."

With a *Life of William Pitt*, I retired to my bedroom. It was always the safest place when disaster threatened. But this time all went well. Bee's chickens graciously gave way to R.T.'s steak. We made cocktails and hoped our refrigerators would do their duty. The only flaw in the bottled gas system, so popular on outlying farms all over Canada and the States, is that it gives no warning when it stops. You have to guess when one enormous cylinder is empty and it is time to attach the next. Otherwise freezing-power may cease in the middle of the night and everything be spoiled by morning. American mechanical ingenuity, long fostered by exorbitant domestic wages and the demand of housewives cultivated beyond whole days in the kitchen, could perhaps invent a warning whistle.

After several false alarms, at each of which my household suffered anticipatory apoplexy, H.R.H. and the Duchess arrived. Malvina had long been at a window. "My Lawd! My Lawd!" she chanted suddenly, "De Lawd comes! Hallelujah 'tis de Lawd!"

Bee Meade, regarding her ecstasies with misgivings, retorted, "Nonsense, Malvina! You can't have religion now. Pull yourself together. Where is the pepper?" But my largest Abigail continued to bow and roll as if possessed. What an inconvenient moment for visions, thought Bee. But you never know when a Bahaman villager will choose to be 'saved'.

Casually the wife of Victorian page and Edwardian courtier glanced out of the window. Not Jehovah, but the Windsors were at the gate. They had motored twenty-six miles from Hatchet Bay over the earthquake in road semblance. The Duchess still looked delightful. They were both very entertaining. We dined upon a porch with an unexpected view of the pantry refrigerator.

The Duchess said nothing could be more inspiring in such a temperature. Two gardeners, disguised as butlers—co-equal, but certainly not co-eternal—collided as they shut the door. The culinary exploits of my friends had made possible the success of the party. The Duchess's wit ensured it. I enjoyed myself very much, in spite of divers mishaps. For whatever could go wrong, of course did—in spite of the fervent and misguided labours of Ira and his argumentative colleagues.

As we sat in the big, shadowed living-room after dinner while the Duchess told us of escape from France barely ahead of the Axis occupation, the lights began to fail. Airily, I rang a bell. Nobody answered. With excuses, I sought the kitchen. It was empty—and three parts dark. My shouts brought our harassed driver whom we turned into a gardener at will. "You must get the engine going at once. There's no light——" I said. "There's plenty, Ma-arm," he replied, "but it's gone into the garden."

With considerable ingenuity, but no warning, Ira and he had fixed up an arc light on the end of a whole bale of flax, and were waiting to show the Governor and his Lady what they considered should be seen. Each had his own ideas.

The Duchess kindly allowed herself to be led down a hill into the valley, and I learned afterwards she had said all the right things about the lilies and the marigolds. Ira was in ecstasies. Heaven could offer him no more. But that is the usual effect of the lady who changed English history. An American business man, neither easily nor willingly impressed, described her as having 'charm, poise and dignity'. She has quality as well. Like Kathleen Scott (once the widow of the polar explorer), infinitely vital and effective, she is definitely a person and real because her faults are the defects of her qualities. Even in a crowded station waiting-room she could not be overlooked. The Duchess of Windsor has a mind and uses it. So many make use of other people's. She has instant wit and wits. She has plenty of courage, although, like the rest of us, she does not always employ it. Perhaps no one of us has enough courage for the whole of life. Like truth, it may be that courage is 'too big for one man's pocket'. Anyway, women do not have pockets these days.

To return to the Duchess—fascinating study for historians—she loves baubels. But so do we all, in one way or another. It is the last fragment of childhood left in us. Sometimes as a starved child, we are greedy for satiety and it never comes. What does it matter, the label on the baubels—dollars or medals, or the comforting insurance of possessions, titular or aesthetic—are they not all the same? If humanity finds its gods strayed, it must be bolstered and buttressed with the next nearest to the unobtainable.

The Duchess gives pleasure. She also gives excellent counsel. In the delightful and difficult, the near to impossible, Bahamas, I have seen many people fail. I have seen the Duchess succeed.

At London's Albert Hall long ago, I heard the then Prince of Wales address thousands of young people. He said, "Never to have failed would mean that one had never attempted anything very big——" In confidential dusk, after a Nassau dinner-party, an officer complained to the Royal Governor that his job was inadequate, it gave him no opportunities. Dissatisfied, he regretted and perhaps exaggerated his former importance. The Duke may have smiled. He is reported to have said, "A job is what you make of it. I was once King of England."

H.R.H. has done a great deal in the native case—to and for the Bahamas. But that night on Eleuthera we talked of gardens.

H.R.H. is a keen and knowledgeable gardener. Even in the odd combination of lightning and Cimmerian dark evolved by our amateur electricians, he grasped the plans we sought to implement. Hurrying from one problematical bed or border to another, we found the Governor knew more about plant habits than all of us put together. It was amusing—that Ruth Draperish inspection of yesterday and tomorrow at midnight. For, of course, nothing was at its best. It never is in a garden. The present tense does not exist. 'It will be' or 'it was' represents our anticipations and our recollections. There is no realization. That is why gardening is so exciting.

Ruth de Marigny was one of its victims. No more than I could she resist meddling in creation. She lived, that summer of 1941, about three miles away on the north shore of Eleuthera. Her house was on a Hans Andersen pattern—fairy-tale but grim. For its hunched thatch roof, shaggy as Goblin eyebrows, peaked through a thicket of casuarinas. Ghost grey they rose—spears or tapers in the changing light—to preclude approach. Ruth was two different people—very grown-up with smooth shining hair, assured, informed, not exactly pretty, but subtly attractive like pedigree porcelain. Then she smiled and a little girl appeared, delicious, expectant, defenceless. Sitting with her in a rather bare room, sophisticated because its discards were deliberate, surrounded by books in several languages, by seed catalogues, horticultural treatises and bulbs, I remembered a London *Times* critique of my first travel book—'She asked for whatever she wanted with the assurance of a well-bred child who has never been refused.' In such a manner Ruth asked of life the improbable and of Freddy de Marigny the impossible. It is strange now to remember the weaving of the tapestry in which those two, eager for living, but in such different ways, Ruth generous and confident even with her flowers—which grew no more than mine!—were to become entangled with the Oakes family in so sombre a pattern. In those days Eunice Oakes reminded me of Ceres, the gift-bearing goddess. Her houses were full of great lilies and her spirit of gay kindness. Spacious and plentiful, harvesting friendship, she shared her habitual happiness. Ruth was different. Quiet, reserved, content to be alone on Eleuthera, she was a delicately coloured thread in the

material already on the loom and a character inevitable in tragedy ancient or modern. I liked her immensely. It gave me great pleasure to drive over preposterous sand hummocks to dine alone with her and talk as elegantly as we ate! No other word describes the atmosphere culinary and conversational among the casuarinas. The ghost trees are wild now. As thunder-clouds they brood around the house. The villagers will not go there at night. But to my mind it was always impossible that Freddy de Marigny¹ could be 'that kind of a murderer'. Isn't it the inimitable Hercule Poirot who insists there is only one thing impossible in human nature, and that is to act out of character? I can imagine much of Ruth's transitory husband, but not the premeditated battering of Sir Harry Oakes' head.

Shortly after the Governor's visit, the six hundred two-year-old coconut palms which Jack Hughes had most kindly procured for me from Andros island arrived by schooner—on a favourable wind, a week before we expected them. I have never worked so hard in my life. They had got to be planted or die. It would *not* rain. The new well we had dug and drilled with frenzied speed to depths which the labourers thought might endanger the fields in Australia, produced—out of sheer contrariness—salt water. We had managed to clear eight acres, for Willie Brown Johnson, farmer as well as sailor, insisted that coco-nuts could not be expected to do their best unless they were twenty feet apart. But we had hoped Providence would co-operate with a little rain.

Unfortunately the skies remained molten. Not a cloud would give shade. Every one of those six hundred quite large coco-nut trees had to be unloaded from boat to truck, driven for three miles along the spectre of a track made for our house-building, and then carried shoulder-high over hundreds of sand-hills to where—before they went on through the garden to the new clearings—I waited to drench them with a hose. I inundated myself too, for there was a gale that day and the windmill was working all out. We planted until we could not stand on our feet or move our arms any more. We began again as soon as it was light next morning. Relays of small boys gathered dry seaweed on the beach, and brought sacks full of it to pack round the nuts still adhering to the palm roots. Local wisecracks consider this has the potency of witchcraft. By the end of the second day there was nothing in the world I loathed as much as a coco-nut tree. Burned, blistered, aching and sick, I went slowly back to the house—and, in the dusk, met a procession of men bringing in a load which we had forgotten. There was no more room in the valley. Furiously, we planted them upon outrageous hillocks, and in Bairnsfather fashion told them, "If you know of better holes"—or, "If you don't like this soil—look out for yourselves."

¹ Mr. de Marigny was tried and acquitted in Nassau, 1943, for the murder of his father-in-law Sir Harry Oakes.

All this while the ridiculous road controversy had continued. The whole village was interested. For the proposed 'highway' would run through some two or three miles of smallholdings before crossing as many hundred yards of Lord Monsell's land, just below his house—as R.T. and I planned it—and ending with perhaps a third of a mile or less across my gentlest sand-hills. It was felt that every household had a stake in this particular bit of country. Each communal name, belonging to legitimate or illegitimate offspring representing generations of the same hospitable family, appeared on the local maps. Everybody was anxious. Thompsons and Culmers and Smiths and Knowles—some with left-hand ancestry stretching back to Loyalist Lords—made plans to clear land beside the new road and to plant crops as soon as they could get trucks over it. How unimportant it all seems in England *now*, and how vital it was to the villagers *then*. For once, the Government was going to do something especially for them. They would feel well looked after, like the mainland.

H.R.H. had always been anxious to help. He suggested that the Crown and the British settlers—Bebbs, Shureys, Monsells, and McGraths—should share the cost of that elusive 'public road'. Enthusiastically I agreed. Delighted, I cabled to my English friends. All would have been well had not the Colonial Secretary reduced, in writing, the Governor's offer—possibly by a secretarial error—to 'improving the road through your property'. Even my unbusinesslike nature could not be content with such misrepresentation. Meekly, I replied that, as two-thirds of the money I was asked to hand over before the work began belonged to the Regional Commissioner for South-East England and to the representative of the Ministry of Economic Warfare on an international committee in Washington, could the position of the proposed road be more correctly stated, its probable length detailed, an approximate date fixed for beginning the construction suggested, and some businesslike assurance given that the work would start at the village end, so that if the funds provided by the Crown and ourselves did not permit completion, the local farmers would benefit as well as those settlers whose property was nearest to Palmetto Point. I did not think there could be any dispute about this request. But Mr. Heape wrote that he 'had nothing to add' to his previous letter.

So, as nobody wanted 'to improve the road through my property'—as amazing a distortion as Alice's hard-worked looking-glass could produce—only the Colonial Secretary's pigeon-holes benefited. But by this time I was tired of the White Queen atmosphere. And I was hurt by the villagers' fatalistic acceptance—"The Government won't help us here. They are onlee interested in Nassau." As they invariably mixed up England with their own national failings, I was roused to protest. "Well, this time, you must help yourselves. Come along, we'll all get together and make a road—somehow."

We did. It was a preposterous undertaking, for we had neither sur-

vey instruments, machinery, nor material. We had not any apposite knowledge either. I plotted the road myself, with memories of compass traverses in Libya, but the desert there was flat. On Eleuthera I had to plan from one hillock to another. We could not follow the direct line of the old footpath—Mr. Jarrett's 'public road'—south of Carey's Pond. For it ran across something like a mile of deeply pocketed rock, beside which local farmers tried to raise a variety of crops. Adding enormously to its distance and taking intransigent gradients in our stride, we drove the road over the soft white soil, cluttered with palmetto north of the pond. The whole village turned out to help. We had three or four gangs working every day, and even the children collected stones to build up the more obstinate depressions. My most treasured palmetto, sole decoration of the landscape, were sacrificed by the hundred to make corrugated causeways where the roadway threatened to lose itself altogether in marsh.

One evening I sat down upon the highest 'hill' beside the burn-brown lake and wept—because I had wanted to keep that bit of land unspoiled and secret, but also, I suspect, because I was tired and sad and disillusioned and I had had no lunch and only half a breakfast. This often happens on Eleuthera. For you cannot count on food. On the rare, calm days, the Palmetto Point men go out to fish. Then you can buy for a few shillings any amount of grupa and perhaps some 'lobsters'—really crayfish—as well. But for a fortnight or more, the wind may be too strong and the seas heavy even within the reef. Then nothing from the ocean comes in for the larder. For half the year, when it is moderately cool—like May and June in England—you can grow your own vegetables and count on some form of local fruit, citrus, soursops, custard-apples, pineapples, mangoes and avocado pears. But the various seasons for all the semi-tropical products are short. There are months when nothing fresh can be bought or grown. Then Eleutherans have to depend on the shelves and store cupboards and the huge meat refrigerators of Hatchet Bay. There—by the goodwill of Mr. Levy's admirable organization—you can get American canned goods and groceries as well as excellent dairy produce from his own herds, the greatest boon bestowed upon the Bahamas for a century. But Hatchet Bay is twenty-six miles from us, over the 'stones and the holes of hell', as one of my visitors put it, so nobody likes risking a truck's springs or its tyres. Somebody *has* to go across it occasionally to bring out supplies, but most of us stay hungry as long as we can. This is the only alternative, for the villagers are far too poor to grow more than they need themselves. They are lazy and ignorant. But—apart from the inertia which comes from inbreeding and generations of under-feeding—they suffer from a complete lack of the guidance and assistance usually afforded by local Governments. With the best will in the world they cannot put back into cultivation soil smothered in centuries-old bush. It costs about £12 an acre to clear such land, and much more if

dynamite has to be used on the rock. An extra £4 an acre must then be devoted to fertilization. When all this has been done, there are no roads to permit quick, cheap transport to the rare harbours. There is no assurance of suitably equipped ships or of any market at all. Before agriculture can be developed—and successful—as it was in the era of slave labour, the Government will have to provide proper roads to serve, not a geographical design, but the needs of villagers and settlers. They will also have either to subsidize new clearing and planting or—more profitably—loan the necessary machinery. Then—with fixed prices and an assured official market as in the majority of modern countries—the Bahamas may find a stable and lasting prosperity. Until all this happens, well-meaning settlers, enthralled by Out-Island beauty and inspired by the Rhodian vision of civilization, will constantly be as hungry as the forlorn villagers.

Week after week our road grew. Odd things happened to it, especially when it neared the village and everyone wanted it to serve his own plot. The Bethel farmers, Hermann and Selathiel, were generous in giving their services—and their experience. One worked at each end of the venturesome track, and without them it would never have been completed.

We had to use a lot of dynamite on the worst stretches between the small holdings, and only the Bethels knew how to deal with it. It is amazing that we did not blow ourselves sky-high, for our charges were often wrongly packed. We started with what seemed to us clear logic—the harder the rock the bigger must be the charge. But of course we were wrong. The destruction of ‘most everything’ except human life, including somebody’s best hat, reft from his head, showed us that resistance increases the power of the charge. Thereafter we reversed proceedings and got on better. But I was glad when we had used the last sticks. For nobody really enjoyed carrying the cases—on his head—and the caps in his pocket for three or four humpety miles, when at any moment he might trip and—to his perfervid imagination—marry the two with Hitlerian results. So I had to go myself—with the truck—and jolt my explosives along, over and into the familiar obstacles, without knowledge of their habits, but with a creepy feeling up my spine.

Reward came when the first villager drove himself along the new road. He was not a very pleasant man, and apt to dwell on the worst rather than the best aspects of Britain in the Bahamas. But that day he looked at me with the first smile I had seen on his face. Still wondering, he said, “And it’s open for all of us? We can come over it often as we like? It’s the first time we got somethin’ done for us. I guess we’ll remember——”

As soon as we had completed this makeshift cart-track, deep in sand, and charging up over the most foolish gradients, we started the planting planned so long ago over lunches at Claridge’s with

Monsieur Charles—perceptive, amused, definitely malin, and with the tact of a cardinal—looking over our heads at our maps.

Cases of citrus arrived from the famous nurseries at Winter Haven in Florida. I shall always be grateful to Mr. Albury, of the Government Agricultural Board in Nassau, for the way he arranged—and temporarily financed—their travels. Paying bills on Eleuthera is largely a matter of faith, for there is no bank in all its eighty-seven miles, and often a whole village cannot muster more than a few shillings in cash. Most of the brown folk are—to a greater or lesser extent—thieves, so nobody can keep anything which pleases local taste. When unemployed they steal food. On other occasions they steal tools, rope, wire, wood and newly planted coco-nuts to raise on their own plots!

The division of oranges and grapefruit between Bebbs and Monsells was highly diverting, for each of them by this time had a self-appointed guardian in the persons of the Bethel farmers. Luther Stirrup, whose head was a map of the district and who could make anything grow, adopted me, especially so far as the garden was concerned. Constantly he brought me the most delicious plants, a fig-tree, a vine, and so on. I do hope they are all living. Mr. Vivien Pythrom, landowner and storekeeper at Governor's Harbour, whose wife was one of my comforts for she had a sense of proportion and believed the best of everyone, gave me a quantity of flamboyants, which I picture now as blazing red—probably erroneously, as the proportion of infanticide among my trees would shock even the Holy Cities of the immemorial East, where dirt and righteousness are synonymous.

One morning—things always happen outrageously early in the Bahamas—Ira Knowles stood at my window and gloomed, "Madam, the citrus has arrived. I think you had better come quickly, for Mr. Selathiel is afraid the Lord will not get any grapefruit. Mr. Hermann is taking all the best for his Colonel."

Disentangling the names of my friends from the qualifications of the deity thus accorded to Bobby Monsell, I hurried, unwashed and foodless, to the rescue. I found the resourceful Hermann had forcibly removed what seemed to him the best stock, leaving his smaller, slighter brother to rely on guile. This he had evidently done—and its success was manifest. For I found him feverishly planting what he assured me were lemons. "Very well grown," I said sternly. "Where are the labels?" "Perhaps a trifle mislaid," grinned the irresistible Selathiel. "Do not worry even a moment. Florida lemons are always very fine." With no feeling of guilt, he went on planting grapefruit. Two more miles at top speed I drove, to find Mr. Hermann supervising a magnificent setting of what he called "very ordinary oranges, not what you should have ordered at all".

He knew they were the best navels, intended for equal division

among the three of us. But he is a man of large size and confident manner. Making good use of these, he regretted the disappearance of labels. He insisted that he had hardly been able to extract his 'Bibb's' share, while the Lord, in the person of 'brother Selathiel', had undoubtedly got mine.

Harried, I returned to where the smaller brother, beaming all over, was making extra holes for his ill-gotten trees. "They are all very healthy," he said, and by way of a smoke-screen, "I do not think your Ira is planting deep enough." He had put at least a foot of 'the Lord's' grapefruits underground in order to hide their growth—unsuited, as he knew, to lemons.

By this time Knowles was almost in tears. "Madam, you will have nothing at all, unless you interfere." "After breakfast," I said. It was remarkable—and no doubt unworthy—what a lot I postponed those days till after breakfast. Malvina's coffee was her masterpiece.

My last adventure was the planting of three or four thousand nuts. R.T. whisked them out of some distant isle as if they had been chicks from a Port Said conjurer's sleeves. Our local 'Winston' brought them across. Surprisingly—most of them reached me by truck from Governor's Harbour, with the wits of the driver pitted against the pleasant pilferers perched like parakeets all over his cargo. They wanted the air, they said!

For days we did nothing but plant those nuts, but the pile never appeared to grow any smaller. We averaged about four hundred a day, with six men—and me—working dawn to sunset. When I was otherwise occupied, we averaged nothing at all.

One afternoon I found the whole lot of labourers reposing peacefully in the bathing house. They were extended with the utmost grace—and no shame—in postures impossible to a European. "We were asleep," said Ira, as if it were news—and also the perfect excuse.

"Seems we get on better when you are there," ruminated my driver, who was delightful when sober and a disaster when drunk. "I guess we need a master. We don't so much like each other."

And there is one of the Bahaman problems in a nutshell.

From west to east, covering three or four miles as crows fly—but there aren't any on Eleuthera—we planted those nuts. When it came to decorating the Bebb and Monsell beaches with what I hope—if thieves have limited their greed—will be luscious groves in another two years, we had to carry the nuts in sacks, a dozen or twenty at a time, for an odd mile or so from our overworked new road. Already it showed shameless signs of slipping under the burden we laid upon it. Civilization, after all, is a matter of acknowledged need. White soil on Eleuthera needs nothing but to be left alone. "Sure," said Bullard, "this land don't like anything I do to it!"

1941

Hurricane in Nassau. Ideas in America. Provocation in Canada

THOSE UNENDING NUTS are the last thing I clearly remember about Eleuthera. I have a general impression of sunbaked skin, flayed in places, of sweat and aching muscles, of walking straight into the bliss of warm green sea within the reef—in shirt and shorts, under a cartwheel hat—whenever the land was unbearable, and of walking out again to plant more nuts.

I remember, in the Washington of the New Deal, a Secretary of the Treasury saying that he felt like God when—at precisely ten each morning—he fixed the price of gold. I had much the same exalted conception of myself when—a day or two before I left the enchanted island where I had been so happy and so worried—I saw the first palms shooting. They looked like young lettuces. Alas, they look so still. So did most of my treasured trees till a vastly energetic young man—Vincent Bell—half-American—came from Nassau where he makes quick gardens for the sensible—and the impatient. Adventuring in our valley he planned and planted in the same breath. With the turbulence and success of Genesis the impossible happened. The garden enjoyed it. So did we.

Sitting on the huge, primrose tiled porch on my last evening, I imagined what it would all be like in three years. The casuarinas I had planted eight months ago were already shoulder-high. The oleanders were in thickets well over our heads. R.T.'s trees could not any more be moved without a crane. The flowering shrubs which had survived our misguided efforts to cherish them, were as big as school children and much more decorative. Blooms of every colour and delicate, surprising shapes moved restlessly in the wind, like sailing-boats in Venice tugging at their anchors on a full tide.

Most of the full-grown palms I had planted—with the help of every able-bodied man in the village—were still sulkily alive. Some of them leaned at odd angles. One was an exact copy of an old-fashioned feather hat. Its remaining leaves all hung on one side like ostrich plumes above an Edwardian head.

The new citrus plantations, spreading down the valley, were breaking into their first leaves. I had brooded over them in harassed dreams and worked in sweating heat and rain, sometimes alone in the starlight when I thought the surface roots needed quick covering. They were my creation, with the palm groves that should—but did not—

spring up along the beaches and round the big lake called Carey's Pond. If there should ever be a proper packing-plant with expert supervision—as in Florida just across the way—in four or five years, we might be able to pay our labour from the products of our trees. Coco-nuts in bulk might find a market—for their oils as well as for copra. It would never, I knew, be possible to make the quick fortunes of pre-tariff days when Bahaman pineapples or tomatoes flooded the U.S.A. market. But I thought, in time, with patience, one might make a living. And that is all that anyone has a right to ask. For it is the essence of security, with its concomitant of peace.

In September Harold Christie, one of the gods of Nassau, who has dealt with real estate as if it were yeast in the bread-pan, lent me his delightful house upon a hillock over the sea. There I spent a fortnight in the odd, concentrated, troubled atmosphere of Nassau. It should be a lovely village, with the simplicity and friendliness of such. It should depend on its own huge, populated Out-Islands for food—and on sea, sun and exercise for entertainment. Then it would be paradise. But it is always so bothered about its tourists and its tariffs and its terror of competition in any form. Since the war, it has added a new set of worries. For it has more regulations and restrictions, more pangs and more doubts than any other land could imagine. And it is only seventeen miles long. There is not space for so much fervour and ferment of good intentions. "People are always falling off the edge of New Providence without noticing it," said a wit at the Colonial Office. Like the Irish, Nassau has a lot of troubles, most of which have never happened. But tribute should be paid to the handful of officials who have worked long hours and every day of the week on this scrap of island, without leaving it for a minute in the earlier war years. It was not a good arrangement. A little dollar exchange was saved for the Exchequer, because America is the nearest place and now the only get-at-able place for a change of air and outlook. But health, nerves, temper and sense of proportion were all worn thin by hot seasons, one after another, within the limitations of New Providence.

Eleuthera is in a happier position—for it has at least space and it is largely uninhabited. For fifty miles inland there may be nobody at all. Among its tumbled hills and lakes, on its deserted beaches, it is possible to get away from yourself—however exasperating and persistent your self may be. But in Nassau nobody can ever get away from themselves or anybody else, from their daily work or their particular nightmares. These last spread into the hot, damp days of late summer, when hurricanes threaten.

At one fashionable lunch, where the food and the hostess's appearance were equally perfected, a young clergyman startled us all by suddenly accusing the most popular Allied Consul of being a Nazi.

On the polo-ground an ardent and ancient patriot equally surprisingly

announced that England had not yet fought at all, and was within a hair's breadth of being knocked down by an indignant white-haired contemporary. Such ebullitions mean nothing in Nassau, where disaster, doubt and delight are equally exaggerated.

In Harold Christie's house, high on its hillock above the sea, I met my first hurricane. It was well advertised. At lunch, lovely women were planning with whom to spend the night. They were concerned with the solidity of a roof rather than personal charm. With Lady Rutter and our host, I drove the length of the isle to see the Critchley greyhounds, refugees from the war. Everything by the sea was already bending. We wondered if the station wagon would go billowing away with us, like a parachute. When I got back to the stalwart Christie house, held down, it seemed, by its own good sense and an acre or two of porch, all the servants asked—might they go home to look after their families. The night-watchman, they said, would look after me. Windows were already shuttered and barred. Every other aperture had been closed. All day I had heard hammering. "Of course—" I said. "I'll be all right." With good wishes, well expressed, they left. I sat in the barricaded living-room and read Compton Mackenzie's *Windsor Tapestry*. Its scheme was in keeping with the turmoil of the wind and the havoc it wrought.

It certainly was very noisy, but not worse, I thought, than a big gale on the Atlantic. I remembered a crossing on the long-backed *Majestic* with Sir Auckland Geddes and Sir Robert Horne—and how the latter tried to explain international finance while the starboard port-holes stove in and the hot-water system came to grief, flooding some cabins and making a Turkish bath of others.

The noise increased. It sounded as if the skies, in battle formation, were throwing themselves against the house. Aerial tanks were advancing on all fronts. But it was nothing to the quietest night in London's bombing season.

One shutter blew in and a window broke on the porch. It was difficult to open the communicating door, so I sought the watchman. There he was, in the kitchen, a lantern at his feet and his head lolling into my supper-tray—dead drunk. As I could not shake him into sense, I dragged some mattresses into the living-room, and with them, reinforced the windows threatened by the breach outside.

The hurricane passed within a few hours. But it had transformed the whole island from youth to age. When I went out next morning, there was not a flower or a green leaf left. The sun was shining, but a sudden theatrical autumn had withered the land. It was all brown. A few roofs had gone. Trees were down and full-grown palms stripped of their leaves. The sea had spread wherever it chose. Some streets and gardens were flooded. Schooners had been lifted *out* of the harbour and *in* to the town. They looked shocked. The whole place seemed a bit inside out—and strayed—but it put itself together again quickly

and business went on as usual. So did my difficulties with the Colonial Secretary.

I was glad to leave—by plane for Florida. With enormous relief, I saw the brilliant striped seas within the reef give way to silken ocean. America was a tonic and a bandage stripped from the eyes. For me, there are only two alternatives—desert and jungle, which in essentials are much the same, or the quintessence of modernity. This I find, chiefly, in the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. They represent the opposite extremes of the same creative purpose.

Hurrying across the States on my way to Canada, it seems to me I was talked to by interesting and provocative people for three days and most of three nights on end. Whatever Americans said that autumn of '41 was conducive to thought. The wisest knew war with Japan was inevitable. Even the least far-sighted felt that we shared certain purposes, but few understood exactly what they were—or the situation east of the Atlantic.

I remember an oil man coming out of his drawing-room to sit opposite me for an hour in order to ask about Germany's resources in the Balkans and her intentions in the Caucasus. "How can I know?" I protested. "I've been for eight months in the Bahamas." "You've seen those places, haven't you? You must have some idea." It was encouraging to meet anyone who believed in sight rather than hearsay. We talked of the Reich's synthetic production. I knew what Haushofer and Thyssen had hoped would be the production figures '41 to '44. But I did not know if they were right. Constantly I repeated, "I have no information." At last, with a twinkle, the man of millions said, "I don't want information. I can get plenty of that. I want to know what is really happening."

That seemed to me to put the average American's feelings into the fewest possible words and also the most apposite.

I only had one morning in New York—with business friends at breakfast and with Walter Rosen—always well informed and ahead of ordinary opinion—at lunch, before motoring to Caramoor. There, of course, everybody cast their own *ballons d'essai* into the conversation. There was an interesting party at dinner talking in several languages. Afterwards I was driven to a country halt where the north-bound train stopped. In those twelve hours, I had heard something of American bewilderment. Britain was a mystery to them. What would she do? Could she do anything?

Fancifully, I thought—it all comes from the British official habit of addressing human beings by that awful amorphous word indicative of protoplasm before it gained shape, movement or thought—the 'public'. We are surely the only nation, except perhaps France, which submits to such a derogatory label. Nazi leaders address the 'citizens of the Reich'. President Roosevelt talks to 'the American people', Stalin to his 'comrades', Chiang Kai-Shek to 'soldiers and defenders of China',

thus complimenting the civilians equally heroic in their endurance, and Mussolini to '*il popolo Romano*'. Only we are subjected to the horrible characterless anonymity of being a 'public'. It is but a short further step to considering the peoples of other nations as part of the same unmodelled lump.

"Why do you always want to choose what we should know?" asked an indignant business man in New York. "Can't you tell us the truth and leave us to make our conclusions? We are grown up, you know, like India! We are quite capable of choosing what and whom we want to hear."

The Cabinet had just banned private lecturers in America, which upset the treasured schedules and hurt the feelings of clubs, societies, colleges and universities who had booked their friends and favourites of a decade or looked forward to hearing interesting newcomers. I wondered at the time if Downing Street realized that taking an audience of only a thousand, which is small in the States, and allowing a visiting lecturer no more than fifty engagements in a season, this would ensure some fifty thousand disappointed and disapproving people for every familiar name withdrawn from their lists.

The mistakes of ordinary individuals in America could not matter less. For the States are as outspoken as they are vital, vigorous and progressive, so that in their swift adoption of new interests and new ideas, they forget by Tuesday noon what may have irritated them on Monday night. They are accustomed to speaking their own thoughts straight out, and they respect people and nations who do the same. There is no limit to what they can take—if it is a fact, or a real idea. What they very naturally do object to, most strongly, is being 'managed'. Any suggestion of this rouses American hackles from coast to coast. They are of all nations the most receptive to ideas, the most welcoming to enterprise in every form. Their criticism is to a great extent dictated by their earnest consciousness of evolution. Like Russia, they realize we are in a state of flux between phases of civilization. Because England hesitated so long between the old and the new, doubt in the States swelled into temporary isolationism. But the more of your own truth you share with America, the more friends you have. For that vast beacon of a continent, blazing now into world leadership, has no hard-and-fast ideas trimmed by precedent and prejudice. From east to west the new is always the best—whether human or mechanical. Only considered judgment of individuals does not change, and allowances—which would never be made for the least of official utterances—are stretched to cover the mistakes of familiar visitors. America has always wanted everything first-hand. Above all she wants her own experiences, her own ideas and her own friends.

It is interesting and instructive to note that even now—late in momentous '44—she does not and will not reduce the whole struggling, battling world to 'allies' and 'enemies'. Finland recently found as

many Senatorial Voices raised on her behalf as Poland. Central Europe and the Balkans, to thinking Americans, are separate entities with problems of food and frontier created at the last Peace Conference, forced on to one side or another irrespective of inclination. As such they are judged and by the sheer necessities of living, or their unfortunate geographical positions which made them the victims of Hitler's 'world-plan'.

America is fortunate in her position, for she is far enough away from all fronts to be able to distinguish between politics and patriotism. When thoroughly roused—a slow process, because of her size and her different racial populations—she is singularly clear-sighted. So she may be able to hold the balance between all the exaggerated 'isms which will swell to overweening proportions at the next Peace Conference.

As may be seen, I have a passion for the States. The instant I set foot in them, I feel half my age and twice my size.

Canada I love, but she engenders in me a sense of responsibility unnecessary in America. On a brilliant, provocative day early in October, I arrived in Toronto and was welcomed within the first morning by Customs officials and redcaps, railway-men, a bookseller, several taxi-drivers, the State Governor who had given the loveliest party for me the previous year, some C.I.D. men who fathered me out of the city's hall where I had lost myself after leaving His Honour's apartments, and above all by the Napier Moores. I stayed with them in a delicious house peering under its eyebrows—the deep eaves—at its toes rooted in a ravine. For Toronto strays, in the most satisfactory fashion, over the edge of its last streets into sudden country. Blanche Moore is a lovely sphinx. She has enormous blue eyes and engaging mockery in her smile. She is kind and amusing and the best of companions. She is quite outrageously reliable—except about the times at which cinemas begin, for these she takes as glasses of iced water, whenever she happens to think of them, full or half full, in the middle of the story or at the end. She drives her car to market, shops with precision and effect, knowing exactly what she wants and getting it. I am adamant about the first, but not so good about the latter. I become discouraged. Blanche does not. She is effective and efficient and—without exception—the best listener I have ever known. That is a good thing, for her husband is an exceptionally entertaining talker. I could listen to him all day—and have done so often for half the night, when—after Pearl Harbour—he came back from his office, or it might be from New York, with news and ideas to sort.

What Blanche is like underneath I have still not the faintest idea. And I want so much to know. That is her charm. It lasts. It increases. Even when—at Christmas-time—her shopping overflowed and my own arms were full of parcels, she contrived to remain cool, detached, intact and just enough of a mystery to intrigue without irritating. Napier Moore is a power, for he is Editor of *Maclean's*

Magazine—by which Canada trains and trims her ideas from coast to coast—and Director of the great publishing company fathered by the brilliant Colonel Maclean.

The premier Dominion has no use for slipshod thinking. It does not crave an excess of entertainment. It has found life tough and serious. So the people of Canada think as hard as they have been forced—by climate and agricultural slumps, but also by their own ideals—to live. The periodicals they prefer are full of information. This they criticize and discuss. You cannot hope 'to put over' in Canada anything less than your own profound conviction. For opinions, the Dominion has no use. Pretences, appearances, shams she is quick to discover and discount. That long, hard winter, when Hong Kong fell and Canada knew she had lost some of her best sons, without their having had any chance at all, when Pearl Harbour was attacked and Japan—invincible, it seemed—swept down to Singapore and Burma, that winter I learned a little about the country.

CHAPTER XXXI

Canada, 1941 to 1942

By Invitation of the Ministry of Supply

AT THE INVITATION of the Ministry of Supply, I spent some weeks touring Canadian war plants and telling the workers what it was 'really like' in England. But I learned from them far more and in many different ways.

"The most spectacular thing about Canadian war industry is that it is there at all!"

So spoke a factory manager, sitting at an outsize desk. Parts of a gun lay beside the ink-pot.

"We had to start a long way below the bottom," he explained. "For we had to design the tools to make the weapons, and that's no easy job. Precision tool-makers are artists and they're apt to be temperamental. We had a war of our own at the benches—hell's corner, we call it! But M is a wizard with gauges. He invents them in a nightmare and then makes them work. We never had a tool drawing, but we are turning out trench-mortars and bomb-throwers all the same."

Nearly every war-plant in Canada was faced with the same difficulties. For the instant the Democracies started all out on munitions, every machine-tool was in service. "Beg, steal, borrow, contrive, invent," had to be the motto of ingenious managers faced with the demand for six times as much production and little more than their wits in the way of material.

The first plant I saw in Toronto was a small one, but from twenty-five people making elevator equipment in 1939, it leaped in a few months to a hundred and thirty people making trench and smoke mortars. By 1941 it had set itself the task of turning out hundreds of bomb-throwers a month. Used on tanks, they were particularly effective in Libya, for their charge is about three-quarters smoke-screen and one quarter high explosive.

"How many women are working here?" I asked as we set out to see the factory, half of which had been warehouses and a stable up till the last expansion.

"About a fifth of the workers are girls, but as we grow, the percentage will increase."

Of course, I asked how they compared with men on ten-hour shifts, with a break for midday or midnight lunch. An elderly foreman replied, "They are better at routine. They don't get bored, however monotonous the job. But we move them about so that they don't always have to work the same machine."

I suggested that Canadian girls were particularly resourceful and quick-witted. "They are brought up so sensibly to depend on themselves."

The tool-designing 'wizard' who had joined us, said, "Girls have got men beat a mile on anything they don't have to lift above their shoulders!"

Actually I found that 40 per cent of the women employed had only had a month's training to make them 'tool-minded'.

A young married woman, running a milling machine, told me she had taken a course at a technical training-school.

"What are you working for?" I asked. "Because of the war, or because it is an interesting job with good money?"

"I'm afraid it's the opportunity I am after. I'm ambitious. I want to get on."

"That's rare," commented the foreman. "Mostly it's the men who'll tell you that. The girls are more patient. They'll stick to the same machine if you'll let 'em."

There was, I believe, only one English machine in that whole plant, and I felt I had met an old friend when I saw its name. But the Chief Government Inspector came from Manchester, and the Shipping Manager, who called himself 'shock-absorber for all departments', was from Somerset. A fitter who found his work so interesting that he travelled to and from it twenty-seven miles each day, with five changes of street-car and a lot of footwork as well, told me, "We've got a grand boss. What he thinks to-day, the whole plant does to-morrow."

In the assembly and inspection room, which a few weeks ago had been a cobweb-hung loft, a Scot from Fife tried to explain why he had come to Canada. "You get a better life and a better chance this side, but it was my girl decided me. She'd seen the railway advertising pictures,



1 Planning the house "R.T." (Mr. Symonette) and his foreman, Mr. Roberts, with Rosta Forbes,

2 Making the road for our building trucks

3 On the site—a sandhill, where now the house stands—Granue Long Pond in the distance

THE DAY UNICORN CAY BEGAN

Photos: Virginia Taggar





1. On the terrace with very young oleander, in the wind-blown foreground

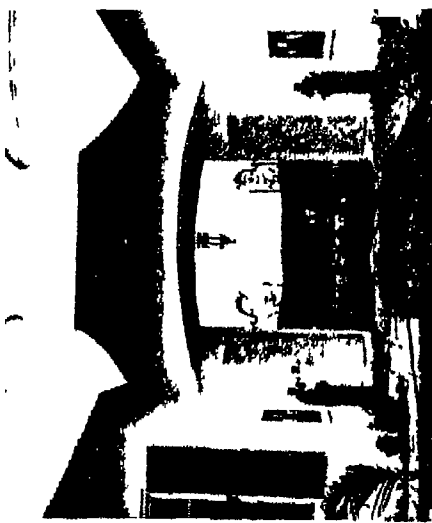
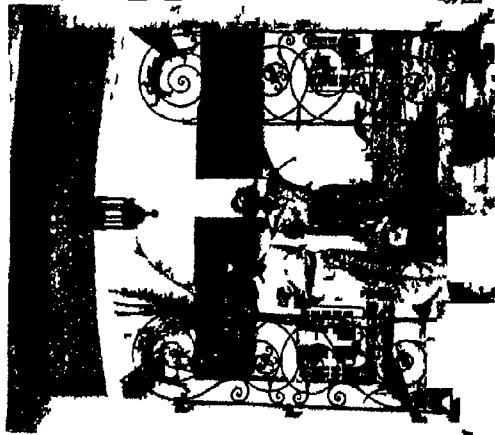
2. Looking out from the courtyard, Grannie Long Pond in the distance

3. Unicorn Cay—just built and very bare 1940

4. The gate was rescued from the McGrath's London house, bombed in 1940

5. Coconuts for planting at Unicorn Cay

BRIEF VISIT IN 1941



and she wanted to know—and to come and see—if they were real.”

By that time the group included an Australian, who had been a ground mechanic with the A.A.F. at Gallipoli in the last war, and a Canadian German who had fought on the other side. “He’s one of the most reliable engineers we’ve got,” said the manager—from the English east coast.

Against the new, large windows, two girls in blue cotton, very neat about the head, were carefully taking to pieces and inspecting the finished motors. “The Government asked for science graduates from the Universities. They get two months’ instruction in blue-print reading and precision instruments. Then they can do this specialist job.”

I wondered whether the hard-pressed soldiers who would use those mortars in the glare and dust of North Africa, or perhaps on the ice-bound Russian front, would be amused at the idea of their weapons being tested by the sort of girls they would marry when they had put the world to rights again and made their homes secure.

Another day I went to see the Bren-gun factory. I believe it is one of the largest war-weapons plant on the American continent. It had in the winter of 1941-42 seven thousand workers, and the firm intention of doubling that number before the next Christmas. The factory goal was ‘thousands a week’. And the manager ably expressed the spirit of Canada as I saw it, when he said, “The only intention of our industry to-day is to win the war. When that’s done, we’ll think about a general plan for living.”

For a whole day I walked about this fabulous plant, and then I tried to sort out my impressions. This is what I can remember: a hall a fifth of a mile long, with three thousand machines all in action; straight line production continuing night and day; air; warmth; bright cheerful light. A host of strong—sometimes it must be confessed *large*—young women presiding over from one to four machines. Trolleys from the canteen, loaded with ‘pop’ and chocolate bars. A tall, corn-coloured girl working a turret lathe, as easily as if it had been a sewing-machine. It took all my strength to move one lever. “Every girl who came on it stayed an hour and then quit,” explained the goddess in blue overalls, “but I decided to make a job of it and now it’s all right. I can manage easily.”

“What were you before you came here?”

“A hairdresser,” she said, “but I didn’t like it. Too much talk and fuss.”

A blacksmith who had worked for fifty-three years on a steam-hammer, in a series of boiler sheds, insisted to me, “I am mos’ near eighty and not nearly done yet.” “How much longer are you going on working?” I asked. “As long as I live,” he retorted. And his foreman added, “Only a Scot could hang on so long.”

In that factory, as in many others I saw, production had got going as if men and women were hurrying along the eighth day of Creation.

'Growth' is certainly Canada's industrial slogan. If I try hard to think what most impressed me in those weeks of—for me—exciting discovery, I find two memories. One is of a thin, rather tired but very earnest young manager saying, "It's amazing what a lot can be done just by not knowing that it *can't*." On the desk in front of him were the parts of a new weapon, but the blue print by which it was supposed to be made, was still delayed on the Atlantic. The other is of an aeroplane factory—primrose yellow wings and bodies, keen young faces—indeed everybody seemed young there—a fearful smell of the dope used for waterproofing, girls sewing canvas, men spraying or carpentering or fitting, and on the walls a specially striking poster—I'm not sure it isn't the best in the world—'Let's go, Canada'. That grim, gay face of youth defiant will keep me going so long as I've got any feet to go or any voice to use.

One of my most interesting visits was to a Small Arms factory. The youth who drove me, quickly, over slippery streets, with snow just hesitating into ice, said cheerfully, "By the end of this war, you'll see, every soldier will have an automatic gun. Lot more effective than rifles. I can tell you, at our place we're looking ahead. It's the boss's idea that you've got to get the thing done, and that's all there is to it. One of these Government chaps asked him, 'Is it possible?' 'It's necessary, isn't it?' asked the boss. 'Well, then, 'course it's possible.'"

When we entered the imposing newness, neatness and pale green or grey cleanness of the rapidly expanding plant, I thought my driver had been right. This factory, which makes rifles and guns, began in August, 1940. Before that, there was nothing at all—just fields, rather particularly empty ones. By November, 1940, twenty-five to thirty men were making things happen in a great deal of space. In January, 1942, there were two thousand employees and half of them were women. "Why not more?" I asked, thinking of British plants where women engineers have proved their worth; of snow-upholstered Russian roofs where I had seen women steeplejacks—and telegraph repair gangs, not a man among them. "We are growing all the time," said the manager, laughing at me. "We'll have 60 per cent soon. But you must remember your English girls are more used to factory work. Before the war, ours went in for lighter industrial work—chocolate-making and wrapping were favourite trades. Now you'll see them running four machines in ten-hour shifts." I was introduced to a floor supervisor. Tall, slim, decided, she knew how to do her job and had plenty to say about it. "Maids with domestic experience are about our best workers," she told me. "They can put up with anything."

"Well, what do you think of that?" laughed the manager.

"They keep their tempers and they know how to get on with everybody. Not like some of the shop-girls who have temperaments." She spoke as if a temperament were a full-grown tiger. "The

Westerners are grand . . . solid and conscientious, no nerves. It's a big venture, their coming way over here, and they mean to make a success of it. They've not been used to money, so they're pleased with their good wages." A shift was changing. I looked out of the window and saw men and girls piling into cars, bare heads, huge thick gloves, fur coats huddled over slacks and shirts, windows pulled up and chocolate bars unwrapped, older men in dark overcoats, six in each vehicle, lifts arranged in advance, no fuss, the parking place clearing quick as toothpaste squeezed from a tube. They all looked healthy and tremendously energetic. I sighed and wondered how England was getting on. Our factory workers are thinner. They have to walk to overcrowded trams and buses, blind in the black-out, unless Jerry blazes red across the night.

Off we went, through 175,000 square feet of new building. All the sloping roof-windows look north, to give artisans an artist's coveted light. My first impression was an army of machines, ranged for battle in close formation, and very few people. A sense of calm in spite of the mechanical noise. No posters, such as cover Russian walls. Just fourteen hundred steel giants, examples of tested modern efficiency with a surprising economy of movement. "It isn't necessary for two intelligences," explained a mechanic. "My machine does the work. I only have to look after it, and that's not hard."

The manager interposed. "There's still a substantial element left to the operator." This is true—tightening, cleaning, in some cases meticulous adjustment.

'Small Arms' makes the famous Enfield rifle which defended Egypt, took Syria, Persia, Madagascar and Abyssinia, and finally helped to sweep the Axis out of North Africa, then Italy and France. My own experience is with sporting rifles, shooting for the pot, or occasionally for a rare head. But as I held an Enfield and tested the new sight, I thought of all the different eyes which would narrow to look along similar barrels, slant eyes of Chinamen in the sixth year of their amazing war; Russian eyes snow-reddened, fatalistic eyes of Arabs seeing death as a prize; blue eyes from Australia with the blue gums and the blue mountains of their homeland in their minds, and before them the heat-blackened sands of Libya with camel skeletons as the only landmark. "Six thousand a week is our goal," said the manager. "We'll get there some day—sooner than you expect."

In the same plant I saw a gun so neat that it made my mouth water. For parachutists this—it packs into what I thought of as a hunting sandwich case, but it is a bit larger really—15 in. by 9 in. by 2½ in. It only weighs 8 lb. and it is a matter of seconds to get it together and into action. I thought how useful it would be when we begin descending—not at all like manna from Heaven—on the ordinary, everyday Germany which did not want the war and must by now be thoroughly disgusted with it.

"Guns are sure more interesting than women," said the youth who drove me back to Toronto, when I asked him if this extra task meant keeping his wife waiting. He had begun working at 25 cents an hour in a motor firm, but being ambitious, "he'd never let up if he saw an opportunity"—result \$180 a month, five men under him, designing gauges, night work and work on Sunday if there happened to be 'some clearing up', but still in the twenties and all the field of engineering in front of him. Eyes would not pass him for the army, though he'd tried.

"We mostly get a car or a wife, soon as we get a job," he said. "Mine's a car. Doesn't take so much of one's mind."

At Massey-Harris, whose farm implements I had watched food-producing in some way or another all over Canada, I heard how England cabled after Dunkirk—she mightn't be able to keep pace with the tremendous supply programme we had all set ourselves. English factories would be bombed, we knew. We were preparing then to fight 'on the beaches, in the streets', house to house and from hayrick to cattle barn on the farms, with women sharpening kitchen knives as a last line of defence. But Canada knew we had to have something to fight with. So into the first available plane got the Air Minister and Massey-Harris's manager—off to the States they went and bought a thousand plane engines. My belief is they bought every engine they could lay their hands on! And Canadian aeroplane building never missed a beat. On it went, expanding all the time. Massey-Harris had to design its own tools like so many other plants. When I heard this, I remembered a Midlands factory newly set among wet, green fields. Warning lights told that raiders were overhead. Nobody moved. Workers stood, solid and busy, beside their machines. But I noticed two or three foremen with anxious expressions. They looked round and there was a murmur in which I could distinguish the word "Harry". Then, with one rush, every un-overalled man on the floor had flung himself upon a small, grey, wizened figure which protested violently. As it was hustled through a door and downstairs towards the shelter, the manager with me breathed relief. "That's all right," he said. "We can't afford to lose Harry."

"I thought it was a violent assault on a fifth columnist," I retorted.

"Getting old Harry under cover is always a fight. He hates going, but we can't take chances with him. That man has designed a lot of our tools, and he's the only one we've got who knows how to make a . . ."

When the 'all-clear' sounded, I saw 'Harry' back at his bench, ruffled like a pelican and still cross, but bent over him were a row of men, listening, watching. "When he's got into those fellows' heads all he knows himself, he can go roof-spotting for all I care," shrugged the manager, "but till then he's a damn sight more valuable than bar gold and we're not risking him."

With spruce from Vancouver, birch from all over the Dominion, glue made from milk, and only a few metal parts from U.S.A., Canada's wooden wings were growing like an aerial forest. At Massey-Harris Company I saw them. Fuselages were fitted with the complicated 'plumbing' that always reminds me of the human inside.

Three shifts worked night and day. "We started last year and already we're doing more than twice our designed production," said a foreman. And he showed me the spars which are the spines of aeroplane wings, as long as the ordinary house front but constructed with the precision of a scientific instrument. Three thousand pieces of wood go into each wing.

"Is it stronger than steel?" I asked.

"Well, trees stand up to any wind, don't they?" retorted somebody, and the manager explained, "Wood has twelve times the strength of steel in ratio to its weight."

In Canadian factories they don't mind questions. "Why don't women get the same wages as men for the same job?" I asked, with memories of Russia, where I doubt if the factory pay-roll knows which name means which sex, and of war-England where women were already doing all that men said it was impossible for them to do.

"We don't expect them to have to keep their husbands," retaliated a quick thinker.

"In nine months we'll be twice as big," explained the manager when I spoke of the plant's amazing growth, and he told me how they had gone to cabinet-makers, organ-builders, piano-manufacturers, and said, "Look here, you've got to make wooden planes now." All the craftsmen with fingers accustomed to wood were represented in this firm which was venturing with such success in a field where "our hardened old-timers have only a year's experience".

"Are they war-conscious or work-conscious?" I asked as usual, and the honest answer came: "If we don't keep up production, the men would bawl us out"—this from an executive—but still, on the whole it's the job rather than the war. The first bomb will change that, and even now we have some who think overseas."

I liked that expression.

From sixteen-year-old lads being trained for that intended expansion to a seventy-year-old craftsman with fingers cabinet-clever who says he is now "air-minded on the ground", all the workers were evidently keen on producing the more of everything which MacKenzie King, Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill were then demanding.

Toronto shipyards were building mine-sweepers for both sides of the Atlantic. I was taken over the yards by an engineer who, at sixteen, had run away from home to join the R.A.F. in the last war. "All I did was to peel potatoes for six weeks—work with the 'kitchen police'—then my father hauled me out, and this time I'd hardly got enlisted when they shoved me in here."

There were no women in Toronto shipyards—except in the offices. I wondered why till I saw the huge hydraulic forming presses shaping hulls out of twelve-foot sheets of steel and punch-presses ramming holes in thick steel plates as if they were nicely chilled butter. To me, that endless hall with its machines, like prehistoric animals in rugged metal, was a chapter of Genesis. Instead of land and sea, metal was taking fighting form. And the future as well. For V in red, white and blue appeared on the chests of all the great steel mastodons shaping, in their colossal robot jaws, the sides and bottoms of the ships we so desperately needed. The triumphant letter, V, adorned the 'Flying Scot', a portable counter-sinking machine which raced about 'improving' (according to my inexpert mind) rivet-holes already made.

I talked with a seventy-year-old worker who intended to die 'as near a ship as he could', because he had spent all his life with them. He was of Scottish parentage. Four-fifths of Toronto Shipbuilding Company's thirteen hundred employees, who looked forward to January because then they would be laying the first keel of bigger and better mine-sweepers with more speed, more space, more crew quarters, more deadly apparatus than any others of their kind, were originally Scots or from England's grim north-east—'a hard land and a tough land; the land of a warrior breed'.

"If you call Mac," said the manager, "half the shop looks up."

Beside building the hulls, Toronto Shipbuilding Company assembles the ships. I saw several on the slips and afloat. Others had just gone out into the Atlantic, before ice closed the river. "Takes a quarter of a million hours' work to build a mine-sweeper," said the manager. He told me, "We punched the first hole in June, 1940. There was only the ghost of a yard then on reclaimed land. Now we're growing so fast we soon won't know ourselves. Of course, we're building more ships next year. . . ."

The sixty-two-year-old Superintendent of hulls, another Scot, pointed out, as a good omen for the New Year, a grain-boat from the lakes lying alongside. She was called the *Victorious*.

"And we've little Norway over there," said someone, pointing to what seemed to me as much ice as earth.

Yellow training planes were wheeling in grey sky. Very cold it looked, like European Norway. "They've everything there from primary trainers to bombers."

"But *who* are *they*?" I asked.

"All the Norwegians who can get away across the North Sea—in rowing-boats or anyhow—to join us. Grand they are, but they all want to be in the Air Force. More chance of getting at the Germans that way, I s'pose."

On board a mine-sweeper I watched a man caulking the deck planks with three threads of rough cotton, oakum as the final layer and then marine glue, which comes only from England. No seamstress could

have neater fingers. It was faster than a machine and as even as a woman knitting.

In the sheds, I saw some of the thousand and thirty-five kinds of valves and fittings which go into each mine-sweeper, and I wondered if any work could be more complicated than the storekeeper's. "Experience, that's what does it," he said. "And the older I get, the more I can remember."

I left Toronto Shipbuilding Company with the feeling that I shouldn't so much mind my next Atlantic crossing, because whenever I looked at a seam I would remember an elderly figure in a fur cap but no gloves, because he thought they would hamper his quick, strong wrists, caulking a fighting deck, with the temperature slipping out of the bottom of the thermometer. He would be a symbol of the stout-hearted ships and crews Canada sends out to 'sweep the seas for freedom'.

CHAPTER XXXII

Canada, 1942

Encounter With a Tank. 'Pity You Are Not a Man'

THE MOST SURPRISING THING that happened to me in Quebec Province was a test-ride in a new tank. I had been looking at rows of them ready for inspection in 'Dominion Locomotives' new factory, covering three hundred and fifty thousand square feet of what, not long ago, had been ploughed field. As I watched, a travelling overhead crane picked up another thirty-ton 'light cruiser', carried it—effortless as a vulture with a full-grown sheep in its claws—the length of the mighty hall and deposited it beside its fellows. "You needn't think they are all alike. They are not," said a young-looking American driver, loaned by the Tank Corps. He had lied himself into the last war at fourteen by adding several years to his age, and was furious because he only got to France this time five days before Dunkirk. "Every tank has the hell of a temperament. You've got to know all its special habits before you can get along with it," he explained. While we studied the rough-hewn monsters, their inches-thick armour cast in one piece for extra strength and left rough as rhinoceros hide so that rifle bullets ricochet, he added, "Canadians make fine tank-drivers. They've all the obstinacy necessary and initiative as well. They don't have to be told, like Hitler's Nazis, 'every man must be capable of being his own officer'. The Canadian is just naturally his own boss, and he can make a tank do more than it knows how!" With this the youthful forty-year-old wriggled into something like a flying-suit, wadded, zipped and fur-collared, climbed on to the back of a tank, which looked as if it was

starting for the front, and held out a gauntleted hand. "You coming, too?" he asked. Simultaneously a Government Inspector and a foreman said, "She'll be frozen stiff," and, "She won't have any face left." But, after somebody had loaned me goggles, I was pulled up on to the turret and then pushed down into the hole beside the driver, where a gunner usually sits.

"Now you hold on and don't think of anything else," instructed the driver. "I've got to test her out. Stand up, or you won't see anything, and don't you move once we've got to the field——"

The Inspector obligingly settled himself in the turret and off we went along the road. "Very smooth," I thought, "easier riding than a lorry. I wonder what all the fuss was about." It happened that day to be 17 below zero. As we rolled at about twenty miles an hour, between houses and fences, my face almost ceased to exist. First it hurt. Then it did not. My eyes streamed behind the goggles. I thought of a hot bath and what the Russian front must be like. Then we turned off the road and made for a little wood. Instinctively I put up one arm to shield my eyes. But the small saplings went down like a wave under a ship's keel. Smoothly we swept over them. Quite big growths bowed down in front of us and were no more. The ammunition rack was against one of my hips as I stood on the folding seat and the gun mounting against the other. The metal edge of the 'hole' caught my arm-pits. Suddenly a sort of crater opened in front of us. I was tempted to shut my eyes. Then I thought I would never be able to brace myself upright unless I could see what was happening.

But nothing happened! The tank just swam in and out like a duck diving. And the same description applies to all the formidable-looking hillocks and depressions up and down which—on the movies—you see tanks hurling themselves into action. Anything big . . . and quite terrifying to look at, that tank took in its stride. It could rush up a ramp, fly off the top of it, remain in the air for a surprising number of yards and come down on its caterpillar-track-protected-wheels without breaking anything, human or material. But it did not like hummocks. As we turned towards the road and I wondered whether I was frozen solid right through and would have to be hacked with a pick out of my ice-rimmed hole, I saw a succession of small banks, not much bigger than furrows. The tank figuratively snorted. Perhaps the driver accelerated. Anyway, we took those obstacles like a steeplechaser dropping his hind legs. Bump! I never knew what the word meant till I was hurled up and down and simultaneously as much from side to side as space permitted, while the tank rocketed over those absurd ridges. I suppose, really, it was the sort of shaking a ship gets when she is turned head on into a quick sea, with waves too short for her to rise to them.

Like jelly, I sank down into the fraction of seat below me. Somebody mopped me with an outsized handkerchief. Somebody else—several

people, I think—rubbed me back into circulation. “That was a grand experience for you,” said the American. “Not but what you might have had more clothes on!” He looked at my thin skirt and last pair of silk stockings.

The rest of that day and half the night I spent in a hot bath. As far as I remember, from about 5 p.m. till midnight I systematically boiled. Then I balanced a writing-pad on the soap-rack and—adding yet more hot water—I wrote up my notes in the bath.

‘Dominion Locomotives’ started production without a roof. While hammers were still going overhead, the machines were installed, and at night they were bedded down in tar-paper. Since then two ten-hour shifts have been working day and night. In 1940, ‘a few hundred tanks’ was the goal. Then the Minister of Supplies, the indomitable Mr. Howe, announced ‘three a day’, and the factory began dreaming of multiplication tables. The majority of workers in that particular plant were of French descent. At the lunch hour, I saw a good imitation of a marathon race for the first service. “Those are the French. They eat in the cafeteria. The English mostly bring their lunch with them.” Why, I wondered. Thrift? Or greed—because their wives are superlative cooks? “Any other difference?” I asked. “Most of the master mechanics are British, the operatives are French. The latter are great workers and very reliable, but by night they’ve had enough. They go back to their families and forget about the plant, while the Britishers are apt to worry out their own individual ideas at night. And next morning they’re after the foreman with what they think they’ve discovered to help along the war.”

At Robert Mitchell Company, working two twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week, which had only closed for four days—two Christmases and New Years—since April, 1940, I saw an unending procession of shell-cases being made out of four-inch-wide brass discs. Not for one hour, not for one minute does production pause. “We are all in this job,” said the manager, “but not all out yet, for we’re building a new extension. That’s why you see us crowded here.” Lunch tables were set in the machine shop. Men and girls were eating—about the best dinners I’ve seen—check to check with their lathes and drills. New machinery was waiting to be installed in the new plant.

By contrast with the crowded halls where all sorts of parts for planes, tanks, corvettes and war-weapons are made, the shell-factory was as simple as plain knitting. I watched the flat rounds of brass taking shape under the repetitive punches of huge hydraulic or mechanical presses till the last giant machine turned out twelve-and-a-half-inch tubes. I saw these placed on a rolling belt and passed through fire to make the metal soft enough for tapering. Like tall, shining candles on the altar of a war-god, they came out of the flames.

Thirteen different operations on each case; 800 tons of pressure per square inch to ‘head’ the 2 lb. anti-tank shell-cases; and the record

for boring and drilling is held by a slight, quiet man who so far had beaten U.S.A. with 1,100 cases in eight hours. His machine never stopped day or night. Fifty thousand cases go out in each shipment.

In heavy industry, such as I saw in Quebec Province, only about 20 per cent of the artisans were women. But girls did a great deal of the inspection work. I saw them—of French, British, Polish and Scandinavian origin—war-wives and already some war-widows—marking shell-cases. They explained, "Whenever and wherever a particular shot is fired, it can be traced to the place, date and man responsible for its making, and to the inspector who passed it."

"We were four months ahead of time getting into production, and we are six months ahead of our schedule now," said a Robert Mitchell foreman with justifiable pride.

At the famous 'Industries Sorel' the tale was on the same scale—the first order had been for a hundred big guns and now they had a regular output of thousands.

In this particular plant I was enthralled by the story of its creation. "I looked round for the specialists I needed, and they were all busy, so I got technicians from France and kept them till, after Dunkirk, they began worrying about what was happening to their families and went back to find out." So spoke André Sorel, whose family is famous in Quebec enterprise. He continued, "Fifty million dollars' worth of building and machines! That's what you see now, but we only laid the first brick in October, 1939, and I promised the masons the best drink of their lives if they finished on New Year's Day. All autumn my French experts were leaving their desks to stare open-mouthed at the walls racing up, and going back to them to write to their wives, 'You should see what is happening here! It is *impossible* the progress we are making!' And at 5 p.m. on January 1st, 1940, it was all complete. The men got their drink! Then an agricultural district turned itself to industry—my word, what a job we had, teaching milkmen and ploughboys and haymakers and chicken-rearers to think in terms of machinery. We had two thousand six hundred orientation tests to discover vocational ability. It was the end of the depression. Like locusts, men who had worked all their lives in fields came to us for jobs, and we turned them into mechanics, beginning at the very beginning as we do with our guns. Look, I will show you——" And we went to a vast warehouse filled with scrap-iron, wheels, axles, springs, bars, railway-lines and sleepers, ghosts of trucks and engines, the cemetery of everything metal. It reminded me of a London street after some of Hitler's raids. "Out of this we forge our steel," said Monsieur Sorel.

I watched the process. From a colossal furnace heated to 3000° Fahrenheit, I saw a chariot wielding vast steel jaws—driven by a youth in an iron mask—seize a twenty-foot red-hot ingot. With this held in mammoth pincers at the end of a flexible claw, the machine

turned round and carried the molten mass to a press where, on an anvil, still held in the mechanical manipulator's grasp, it was shaped under two thousand ton pressure per square inch. Out of such an ingot, a twenty-five-pounder or a four-inch naval gun is made.

I watched these guns taking shape over fourteen acres of superlative modern plant. I saw the barrels bored and rifled. I saw the complete weapons—each part separately tested for the flaw that would be a miracle—and at last I saw them mounted on their own gun-carriages with every fitting and instrument in place, numbered and ready for world delivery.

On many the workers had scrawled in coloured chalks such encouragements as "Undefeatable Annie—she'll do in anything."

In a pool off the neighbouring river, frozen highway to lunch—for the workers took a short cut across the new ice to their houses maybe an hour after a mine-sweeper or a stalwart little corvette, tenacious as a bulldog, had gone upstream to get her engine fitted—I saw a host of derelict ships.

"When I guessed the war was coming, I bought them for scrap metal," said the genius of Sorcl. "Those you see will be guns next year. But some of them have gone back to the Atlantic; there was work in them yet."

Last of all in Quebec Province—where I loved the sharp-steepled churches presiding in comfortable family fashion over the well-ordered, neat villages—I saw Bolingbroke bombers being made. Canada, above all things, is air-minded—perhaps because of her size. I thought of this as I followed the growth of the great planes from the first machines which make bolts or rivets by the ten thousand to the examination benches, where each such part is tested, and out again to the assembly halls where I saw steel wings taking shape in the jigs, and bodies forming under expert craftsmanship.

It takes forty thousand hours of work to make a Bolingbroke, twin of our Blenheim. Into it go eighty thousand separate parts, without including no less than six hundred thousand rivets. For its perfection, three thousand specifications and fourteen thousand blue prints are necessary. Repeat these figures slowly. And then imagine what I felt seated in the assistant pilot's seat, with a curve of cellulose, like shaped glass, but lighter and not so brittle, over my head, and the voice of a gunner explaining the instruments massed in front of me. "Well, there you are—and it's the best thing we've got in Canada," said the gay young pilot with far more flying hours to his credit than days since he left school. "Pity you aren't a man. Then you could fly the ship." I agreed with him. I have always thought it a pity not to be a man.

Tanks, planes, shells, nine different kinds of guns, a hundred and fifty specialized sorts of motor vehicles—carriers, 'jeeps', trucks, radio lorries and so on—fighting ships and freighters, I saw them all being

made in Canada that winter of 1941-42. I saw men—in their thousands—learning to use them, women in equal thousands ready to serve in support. The torch was 'held high'. It blazed across the world. Canadians who 'sleep in Flanders' fields' must be at Peace.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Canada, 1942

'One Chooses One's Friendships. One Submits to Love'¹

THAT WINTER IN CANADA WAS—for me—so full of experience that I cannot altogether disentangle the happenings which piled one on top of another. In Ottawa, at one moment, I see myself with Mr. Justice Davis, Deputy Minister of War Services, the indefatigable Herbert Lash, then Director of Public Information, and his colleague, Monsieur Claude Melançon, representing French-speaking Canada in the Supreme Court Building, planning still more speeches. The Canadian Clubs, an important organization representing every form of civic interest and enterprise from coast to coast, had invited me to lecture for them the following winter. Sir William Glasgow, High Commissioner for Australia, wanted me to go to his country where, as a girl, I had been preposterously happy, almost always astride a horse. Mr. Lash, eating a belated and exiguous lunch about four in the afternoon, his sandwiches mixed with a hailstorm of documents, was anxious that I should spend some months in the States contributing to the Pan-American 'good neighbour' policy by speaking about 'Canada at work and at war'. It was all very encouraging. My craving to be 'useful' was at last assuaged.

At another moment I see myself, diffident in a mink coat—my proudest possession and the gift of my husband when it represented his entire fortune—talking to Canada's Labour leader, Mr. Tom Moore. To begin with, we were both nervous because of the ridiculous labels life had attached to us, but, in reality, we were separated by little more than an enormous desk. For I have never had any settled politics. From my father, brilliant idealist, I inherited the fatal gift of seeing not only all the existing sides of a question, but some which have no substance at all. Before I left the small study where Mr. Moore received friends, opponents and critics with relish and considerable effect, my head was full of new problems. Some I subsequently solved. Others are still prickling in the back of my mind.

One evening I see myself listening, enthralled, to Miss Caroline Haslett, enormously successful in Canada, justly so because she had

¹ La Rochefoucauld.

something definite to say and believed in it. An afternoon I devoted to Anna Strong, hearing her speak about Russia, with the enthusiasm bred of her own long experience as part of the official Soviet system in Moscow. I thought she spoke admirably and gave a very good idea of what I have so often tried to express—the inspiration with which an immense number of commonplace men and women have been working for twenty years, in the harshest and dreariest of conditions, to remodel the world they know.

I remember a cocktail-party at which I met Canada's Director of Oils and Fats, the exceedingly good-looking Mrs. Turner. Assured, keen, capable of the clearest expression, infallible in her marshalling of facts and possibilities, she talked to me about the vitamins in fish-oils which Canada could send to England. And while she talked, bright-eyed, enthusiastic, she looked like a picture from a very distinguished and well-dressed gallery. Canadian women often achieve this effect without effort. They are individual and capable and they take these qualities for granted.

I remember a clergyman and his wife who put me on board a train in some provincial town where I had lectured and spent the night with three generations of women, servantless, in a big house full of inherited possessions. It was very comfortable and without strain. The clergyman said something like, "You've certainly given the old country a leg up here." Startled, I asked, "Does she need it?" Then I heard about British refugees who found life difficult and who—in spite of all their efforts to adapt, to understand and to enjoy—made things difficult for their exceedingly generous hosts. Nobody was really at fault. All the Canadians wanted was to make their war-guests happy. My countrywomen with their children were equally anxious to 'fit in' and give no trouble. But as a race the British are far from adaptable. They revel in their own habits. They cannot enjoy any ways but their own. Most of the bomb-fugitives were used to hired service in some form or other. What Canadian women as a matter of course do for themselves, most of the British, however they struggled, showed only too plainly they had been accustomed to have done for them.

I remember being much amused in Montreal when the most delightful French-speaking Canadian General said to an equally enchanting British peeress, looking after—I forget if it was seven or eleven—small grandchildren under the most difficult circumstances, "I hear, Madame, you have taken one of our great houses. . . ." "Oh, no," protested London's famous hostess, accustomed to a malachite staircase and ballrooms in a row, and determined not to be thought profiteering, "we've got one of those little red villas on the hill." Both, alas, were talking of the same building.

Canada, it seems to me, is too afraid of being hurt. Why should she be? She has all that we need—in the way of character and opportunity.

England, perhaps, is still too impressed with what she has been, in appearance as well as in achievement. Some of her guests make Canada feel raw. Some by her are made to feel exigent.

I remember the day and the night of Pearl Harbour, which then seemed the epitome of disaster. It happened that I was due to speak in Toronto the following afternoon. The chairman sent me a note by hand: "Most of the audience will be expecting bombs sooner or later. You must refocus their ideas. You went through it in England. Tell them what it was like, and in the telling, encourage them. You can do this better than anyone else I know."

Greatly flattered, I did my best. It was, I am sure, unnecessary. The audience as usual that winter was serious, welcoming, generous in their applause, discerning in their questions, very anxious 'to get to the bottom of things'.

I saw no signs of trepidation—only an awareness of being in the war now, physically as well as spiritually. That winter, certainly, North America expected bombs. Lone planes, they thought, could land anywhere 'off the map', refuel from secret stores and do a lot of damage without any A.A. guns to interfere. Europe came suddenly nearer, as if the sights of a telescope had been altered. Experiences and emotions hitherto foreign to Canada, became possible and—in idea—familiar.

In Toronto, people were so anxious to hear more of Europe and the diverse parts recently played by countries and individuals that—shortly after New York's first air-raid warning—they arrived at the huge auditorium over the Eaton Store at 11 a.m. to be sure of seats for a three o'clock lecture. Once again the surrounding halls were crowded, but this time I stuck to the stage. When it was over and we had eaten the most satisfying cakes stuffed with good, fat cream and drunk excellent orange pekoe, my special friends gathered round and we discussed Russia, India, and whether it was possible to find a pair of gold kid shoes in Toronto.

With the help of the manager and various singularly attractive Shopping Service experts, shoes appeared with bags to match—there, in the middle of exalted guests at tea. I was going to dine that night with the Lieutenant-Governor and must be suitably shod! It was all great fun, for Canada contrives to bring a current of fresh interest, always friendly, to the simplest happenings.

Later on that winter I spoke about most parts of the world—drawing the map of the war on the largest possible scale—for Red Cross workers and Service Canteens, to recruits at Borden camp and airmen at the new training depôts, to the very smart C.W.A.A.F.s, among whom I recognized brilliant young teachers and business experts of the previous winter, to the whole of Canada on the wireless, to men's clubs at lunch and learned societies at dinner. I even took part in a radio 'Brains Trust', at which we got ten dollars for each question correctly answered

—to give to any charity we liked. Mine went to 'Wings for Victory', as a tribute to young Walter Rosen, then at the neighbouring Manning Depôt, before—fully winged—a pilot somewhere in the battle.

I had only one real break in those months of speaking and factory visits. That was Christmas with Nella Jefferis. Can one ever—with obstreperous pens and shilling bottles of ink—describe the pleasure one gets from one's friends? La Rochefoucauld says—in effect—"Friendship is better than love. For one submits to love. One chooses one's friendships." I was delighted that Nella, who was like a lovely, fine candle-flame, but inextinguishable, should have selected me. I should never have dared the choice. For she was prodigiously popular and she warmed and lighted a large part of Toronto—by the goodness of her heart. Incidentally she had sherry-coloured hair and the eyes of a happy young witch riding the skies on her broomstick. Her mouth was the story of all she had wrought—in grief and love and pain and laughter, but above all in kindness. Her voice was a blithe spirit with wings of its own. However tired she may have been and however flat and dull and sodden like a collapsed pancake the visitor, it made sparks fly. It would be nice to have that voice and the manner which goes with it. What I could do with them on a platform!

In the middle of my Canadian winter my husband cabled that he could not join me as we had planned, for the new Commander-in-Chief Home Forces, General Sir Bernard Paget, wanted him at General Headquarters. This was surprising and—for me—disappointing. Arthur had been retired at the extreme—and indeed outrageously stretched—age limit for a Colonel, the preceding October. We had planned to return to the Bahamas together to turn Robinson Crusoe into some semblance of Cecil Rhodes. But after that cable, half my mind was already on the Atlantic. Boats were scarce and the waiting list for passages very long. A staggeringly good-looking Norwegian, equerry for the moment to Prince Olaf, whom I had met in Oslo, offered to arrange transport for me on a new ten-thousand-tonner. Unfortunately she went on fire—in harbour—before I could get on board. Prince Bernhardt, at General Headquarters with my husband, cabled the Dutch Minister in Ottawa to put me on one of his country's hard-worked ships. I was enormously grateful, for with America in the war, enemy submarines making hell along the coast, and a few saboteurs burning and beaching boats in addition, I thought I might grow grey hustling from one port to another. The afternoon before I left Ottawa I went to thank Princess Juliana for her husband's kindness. She was living in a charming little house in a wood at the Governor-General's gates. The trees reminded me of the great beeches round The Hague, but branches and leaves were quilted with snow. Each twig was neatly fitted into its glittering white coat, frozen hard. It was a lovely sight. For in Canada the snow does not hurry into slush. It stays beautifully tailored, outlining each roof, bush and rail as a court garment sewn

with jewels. H.R.H. was living very quietly with her two small daughters, but she had made friends with Canada. Everybody was delighted with her simplicity, her good manners and her friendliness. To be able to exchange the time of day with a smiling, fair princess, afoot, in fur mitts and hood just like their own, made neighbourly workers feel themselves in a fairy-tale. We talked of Europe and the war—in that quiet room which might have been a hundred miles from a city. The Dutch East Indies were still free, but not at all safe. Yet H.R.H. never wavered in her convictions. Victory would inevitably come. Her home and her life would be in Holland. Her spirit, I think, had never left the small, stalwart land of her own people, which her mother ruled and her children would inherit.

With the feeling that, 'on the spot', I would be more likely to get an immediate passage than waiting in Montreal—dancing each night with the tall Norwegian in a succession of *boltes* not unlike Montmartre—I left for Halifax as soon as I had made my last speech. There General Elkins, commanding coastal defence, took charge of me.

In his house I met the American Naval and Air Mission. They were very keen—like newly polished razor blades—but they were also startled by the way in which Japanese and German submarines were at that moment literally skimming the North American coasts of their shipping. So many plans they had, most of them good. By nobody's experience would they profit. They were delightful—and also determined.

In that February—on the hard-hit Eastern shores, Canadian and American—where wrecks, collisions, torpedoings and fires were all in the tough day's work—there was already total war.

In the various basins of the great port, I saw hundreds of ships. Corvettes, mine-sweepers, destroyers were ready to comb the open ocean for death in all the hideous forms the Nazis invent. A crowd of small, stalwart freighters, scarred, battered by previous crossings, were ready to gamble again in terms of men's lives. The stake was food and fuel and munitions for the battle-fronts. Their crews had been torpedoed again and again. They had been dragged out of icy water or burning oil, hauled, frozen stiff, out of lifeboats, lifted unconscious from rafts in shattering storms, pommelled back into consciousness and circulation, given hot drinks and dry clothes and asked if they wanted another ship. The answer was always "Yes".

"I sort o' got used to it now," said one tough old man. "I been dozen five times in this war, and I'm taking a chance up to the round dozen. Then maybe I'll get a shore job."

In Halifax, as in other centres, there is a Manning Pool specially for the merchant marine. There is also a club which, when started, was intended to be a practical League of Nations, each country to have one room of its own where it could talk its own language. There was a Norwegian, a French, a Greek, a Polish, a Dutch and a Russian room.

"But we've had to use them all for shipwrecked crews," explained the manager.

"What do you do for them when they arrive?" I asked. "First, we give them food and hot drinks, then a hot shower. We issue to each man immediately a thick suit of woollen pyjamas and a box containing essential small equipment—razor, tooth-brush, and so on. The Government provides every torpedoed merchant sailor with \$50 to buy clothes and underwear. We contrive the rest with the help of voluntary services. The bed cases go to the hospital."

At that moment a tall, thin man came in. He was jubilant. "I've just got my ticket," he said. "I've got to go on board now. All I need is a coat."

"We've got you a grand one," said the manager. "A doctor sent it in and it'll do you fine on cold nights."

He took down from a peg what looked like three parts of a buffalo, and presented it to the seaman. We all helped him to put it on. "I'll feel like a zoo," grinned the sailor, but he went off immersed in fur and highly delighted.

"He's from Plymouth—torpedoed on the X. Had a hard time, six days in a lifeboat. The British captain brought his crew here, and he was determined they should have everything there was."

In a big bright hall men of a dozen races were asleep in chintz-covered armchairs. They slept in all positions, over newspapers and food and pipes and letters! "That's what they need most," said the manager. "We don't disturb them. They can take their rest wherever they like."

I never saw men so utterly relaxed.

"They've most of them been torpedoed, but you'd be surprised how soon they get over it."

Three youngish men in very bright new suits were seated on a couch. They were all dark-skinned. I spoke to the first in Arabic, and he was delighted. He came from Aden, and in a torrent of his own descriptive speech he told how at 11 p.m. on a rough night a torpedo had hit them without any warning. His neighbour, in a still brighter suit with a shiny waterproof on top of it, was a Somali, and the third man an Indian. They had all come from different wrecks, "but," said the Arab, "we are of the same religion, so we are brothers." This is the belief of Islam, whose prophet ordained that, under Allah, a man has no race and one family—that of his own faith.

The majority of the men I saw were from Bristol and Liverpool.

I was introduced to twenty-three Norwegians who had been fifty hours in a lifeboat, but had come out of it well enough because they took orderly and continuous turns at rubbing each other's legs, arms and bodies. They said the middle-aged men stood up to exposure and hardship better than the very young ones.

A number of Russians were seated on bunks, smoking and talking

hard, just as I have seen their contemporaries do all over the Soviet Union. After a long voyage cramped together on a freighter, after forty-seven hours in lifeboats, they still had lots to say to each other. I gathered they were all delighted to be fighting the Germans. They were the only sailors who wanted to talk about the war. Two of them were girls. I did not realize it till we had all been talking for some time.

There were Chinese survivors of a crew whose ship sunk quickly after being torpedoed at night. Only one of them could speak English. He described a play they were going to put on that night to help the Red Cross.

"It will be quite short," he said. "Only thirty acts." And I remembered a play in Canton whose one hundred and fifty-seven scenes took three whole months to enact. "We all came from Hong Kong, and we have no news of our families there. We don't know what the Japanese have done to them," explained Male-Ling, who directed the very successful play about an old Chinese merchant and his family, who fought Japanese oppression through a succession of tragedies until every one of the actors had died a vividly pantomimic and heroic death.

The last man I talked with was a Cockney, typical of the Londoners who in 1940 had decorated the ruins of their bombed houses with paper Union Jacks, and shouted to Churchill: "You stick it out, Winnie! We can!"

In a new blue suit, he smiled cheerfully and told me how he had been on an empty tanker which sank in ten minutes after a torpedo struck. "We'd been cleaning out the tanks and they were still open. So the water got in. That's why we sank so quickly. Only a few of us made one of the forward boats, but we rowed around and picked up all but eleven. The sub came up and watched us. Her officer took a lot of photographs while we were hunting for more survivors."

"Well, you're looking pretty well," I said.

"Yes, I'm all right, and I'll be better still when I've got a ship. But I don't want to lose this suit. It's the second time the Government has had to give me a new one. I think I'll send it home by air so's not to waste it!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

1942

On the Atlantic—With a Tanker Convoy

THE VOICE on the telephone was impersonal. "If you can be ready in half an hour there's a passage for you."

"All right," I said. It would mean digging the car out of its snow-bound garage. Drifts blocked the drive. "I'll get down to it with a shovel," called my hostess. "You pack!"

I was staying with a Canadian seicant's widow just outside the busiest port on the Western Atlantic. While I flung things and pushed things into suitcases I heard her spadework under the window. A week's blizzard had altered the landscape.

The car bucketed over breakers of frozen snow and slid sideways down the last hill, but we arrived at the docks thirty-five minutes after the voice had said: "I can't keep the tender waiting."

In a new wooden building ships' captains were vigorously refusing to take passengers because they got in the way and were a general nuisance, while, in a dozen different tongues, torpedoed merchant seamen, rescued from the recent blitz off the American and Canadian coasts, were appealing for 'any kind of a ship'.

I spoke with Russians, Chinese, Poles, Norwegians, and some Indians. All of them had spent hours or days in lifeboats, with the temperature seventeen to thirty below zero. All were determined to get to sea again and 'put one over on Jerry'.

After considerable turmoil I found myself in an ancient tug, chuff-chuffing across the harbour with a tea expert summoned from Canada for important trade conferences in London, and a ship's doctor whose teeth had been knocked out when for the second time 'in one season' a torpedo hurled him from bunk to deck.

With us also was a wizened, wind and salt-blackened merchant captain, who said he was close on seventy, and had been fifty-one years at sea. Master of a 1,600-ton freighter, built for English coastal traffic, he had crossed and recrossed the Atlantic at war eighteen times. He said, "I always start with a convoy, but I can only do six knots, so I'm lucky if in bad weather I can keep up for a couple of days. Generally the second morning out I'm on my own, but maybe if I keep on long enough I'll cross some day in grand style with destroyers and those aireyplanes to look after me."

"I thought the orders were to return to port if you lost convoy?"

The old man winked. I've never seen a tougher or more obstinate

face. "Maybe I don't get the orders clear," he said, "but I reckon to keep going till I get across."

The pilot laughed. "He goes too slow for any torpedo to hit him. Jerry's subs can't believe he's real!" There was decided appreciation in the speech.

A few minutes later we were alongside a long, narrow cargo-boat built for the tropics. She had come from Burma with rice and iron ore for a 'U.K. port', and had seen several ships sunk during her ten weeks at sea, besides rolling through the record January blizzard.

Under the bridge four small cabins opened like cupboards out of a scrap of saloon. The officers slept amidships; the crew aft. The decks in between were little above water-level and were awash whenever there was a wind. The cabin-boy was working his way home from Rangoon to join the R.A.F. The captain was a Swede, definitely disturbed because his laundry had not come on board. "All my shirts will be lost," he lamented. The cook was in love and apt to forget everything but his girl.

Early one morning the convoy steamed out of the crowded harbour. The tankers were in the middle.

The commodore signalled formation from the whaler on which he led the argosy of fuel. We could see a catapult fighter on his deck. As one by one the ships took up the positions they would maintain for three thousand miles or so, I noticed the long lines of the tankers.

It was a League of Nations afloat.

Within a few cables' length a stout, short-built Dutchman was ploughing steadily in the wake of a lean, rakish Swede already rolling in giddy fashion. There was an ice-breaker bound for a northern Russian port, a battered Frenchman streaked with old camouflage, several Norwegians manned by their fair men, curt of speech, born to the sea, and away on the starboard horizon, a Polish destroyer.

But the tankers, taking the greatest risk because one German shot may explode the whole ship and blow up a neighbour or two as well, were from Liverpool and Glasgow and Bristol, the cities that bred sailors before the days of the first Queen Elizabeth.

Our escort included Canadian corvettes. These small, short, sturdy ships are the terriers of the sea. They never give up until they are blown out of existence.

"Submarine near the convoy," signalled the commodore's ship. We put on lifebelts and decided what we most wanted to save, but nothing happened.

That night, fog came down. Without lights or sound, the ships steamed blindly into a blanket of darkness.

"I don't mind the Germans," said the captain, "but this fog gets me worried. We've a ship on either side and others in front and

behind. The least mistake means a collision. We can't even see the fog-buoys." These are pieces of wood dragged over the surface a cable's length behind each ship. Round them, the water spurts.

Next morning, when the mist thinned, there were a lot of gaps in the lines. The tankers had kept position, but some freighters were missing. One picked us up in the afternoon, smoke belching from her funnel, her engine strained to the utmost. The next night, equally foggy, lost us the Frenchman and the ice-breaker.

The following day was exciting. While the commodore's whaler ran up a flag signal we sighted a periscope to starboard. So did a corvette. She was after it at once, firing her forward guns.

The submarine dived. The sturdy little chaser more or less sat down on top of the enemy, dropping depth-charges. These sounded to us exactly as if a mass of heavy chains had been slung violently against our own hull. We left the corvette waiting.

Friday brought us a storm. The captain had ordered everyone to sleep in their clothes. "I'm not going to risk my men waiting beside the boats while you dress," he said. "If we're torpedoed, you've got to be up the ladder in two minutes."

But with a thirty-degrees roll and seas sweeping over the decks, one boat split and a heavy raft loose, I thought the luxury of pyjamas was justified. Whatever happened, we could not leave the ship.

So, wedged in my bunk, I slept well till a sea burst through the door and swamped everything in the cabin.

I flung myself upon my fur coat and a typewriter, but everything else went.

At intervals during the next days we heard that submarines were following the convoy.

"Now we are in the big fellows' hunting ground," explained the captain. "They divide the Atlantic into squares and signal our position from one pack to another."

The storm took toll of the second lifeboat and broke up almost everything on board.

The cabin boy used to lurch up from the galley with a dripping plate and prop it on our knees wherever we happened to be. On the worst day the cook served a greasy mess of yams fried in pork fat. Only one of the three passengers survived this gastronomic error. He was the doctor who had been twice blown from bunk to deck. With charm he succeeded in being drunk for twelve days and nights on end. A remarkable man!

We ate on our bunks or on the floor, backs braced against a wall. Washing was impossible. "I'm going to have a bath when we arrive," said the captain every day.

At last the commodore's signal, "Be prepared for hostile aircraft," warned us we were approaching home waters. The glass was rising. Only a swell remained.

The chief engineer was amusing about his worst night, when a weighty raft built over barrels had broken away and rammed full weight into his cabin wall. "It was just against my head," he said. "I thought we'd been hit, and while I got hold of my torch and boots, I wondered why the bridge telephone didn't ring."

The cook, gloomy because of his love—she was in Sweden—told how a Focke-Wulf bomber had paid three visits running to the last convoy with which he had sailed.

But the rest of the crew were very cheerful, and we launched our kite with enthusiasm. This is the sea version of a balloon barrage. It flies very high on a strong steel wire.

"The Germans are scared stiff of them," said a young second officer, pleased with his new beard, but wondering whether his girl would approve of it. The ship in front of us had a balloon. It flopped all over the place like a wounded whale. Finally it collapsed over our wire.

Angry flag signals flew.

The captain was counting on his kite.

He told us how the Germans drop flares all round a convoy to light it up for a night attack, or have one of their submarines send up a rocket, like a host of candles at a feast, so that for a few minutes there is perfect visibility.

But our minds were on baths. We wondered how much hot water would be available. Then the strangest signal disturbed us. Nobody was familiar with the flag combination. There was some alarm. What new secret weapon had Germany invented. We all stared at the Dutchman's bunting. At last, "My shirts!" exclaimed our captain. "See! He signals he has my laundry aboard." For the rest of the day he beamed. So did the crew.

The enemy planes did not come. On the contrary, our own flying-boats appeared with the dawn, and after that several friendly fighter-bombers dipped low over us while their pilots waved.

So the gallant little fighter on the catapult was never used, and, before we sighted the nearest bit of home, our lost ships came puffing and struggling over the horizon—safe because of the ceaseless courage of the hardest-working Navy and Merchant Service in the world. Another British convoy steamed into its destined ports. Another skirmish in the unending Battle of the Atlantic was won by Canada and Britain.

"A grand voyage," I said to the captain. "Damn it," he retorted. "My bath was cold."

1942

England Says 'No'. Norway 'Occupies' Scotland

BACK IN ENGLAND, after fourteen months west of the Atlantic, I found everything surprisingly changed. Life was in different gear. I do not know whether to describe it as 'higher' or 'lower'.

Regimentation had—of necessity—begun. Bureaucracy was swollen to an extent which must make people wonder if ever again it will *be able* to shrink. Everybody who could say 'no' to anything or anybody immediately did so. How much, I thought, bus-conductors, shop-assistants, the Board of Trade, chemists, Treasury clerks, local food officials and borough councils, railwaymen, tailors, carpenters, sweeps, the Ministry of Information, waiters and waitresses, house-agents and the weather enjoyed saying 'No'! In 1942, it was, undoubtedly, the most popular word in the English language. Little people, who had never been able to say it before, grew bigger and bigger in their own estimation by saying it as often—and as unreasonably—as possible.

I remember trying to buy cigarettes with a Canadian private who said he had never realized what it was like to be thoroughly disapproved of until he tried to buy 'anything—just anything at all'—in a London shop. Without looking up from her knitting, the middle-aged woman behind the counter said she had 'no smokes'. "Could I have a match?" asked the Canadian, forcing himself into courage. "You expect something, don't you?" retorted destiny, wrapped in a woollen shawl. Her voice was so disgusted that I laughed. "I don't see nothing to laugh about," she announced. "Oh—don't you?" I giggled. But the Canadian was himself again. "You," he said, with a twinkle. "Just you. That's all—but it's quite enough."

England had definitely lost her manners. The general disagreeableness was obvious by contrast with the amiability of the Americans, untired by bombs or coupons and queues, safely out of the war, so far as their own homelands were concerned. Yet I was impressed—for the first time in twenty years—by the quality which we have always taken for granted that we possess and which up till 1918, I imagine, perhaps, we did. I do not know what it is. It made us the greatest power in the world. It policed the nineteenth century and pulled the early twentieth to pieces. *It made us feared and respected, liked by quite a lot of our enemies and loathed by some of our Allies. It amused and exasperated America—with reason. It amazed the serious Germans, startled the East, appalled and—at times—appealed to Russia and drove France to the verge of lunacy. It disposed of twenty years of peace, as if they*

were petals idly pulled from a marigold 'he loves me, he loves me not'. It nearly lost us the war. Probably it will be by far the biggest factor in winning it. But what is it? Why are the British so remarkable? "Are they human?" as a French writer asked, or "Is God Himself British?"

I am half Spanish and Celt, so how can I be more than an onlooker, amazed and admiring.

In fourteen months—I realized—England had lost the first wild, careless rapture with which she had defied fate. The bombing season of 1940-41 had made ordinary people consume themselves as flames burning upon an altar. Without any personal consciousness of heroism, they had set about the work and the fight demanded of them—small, ordinary, tired, misshapen people achieving, with oath and slang and an excess of understatement, the oddest kind of miracles. That period had passed. England had now settled down—to work. She did not enjoy it. She was—if the truth be told—rather disagreeable about it. She grumbled and gained solace from the inordinate number of her complaints. She was tired, hungry, sad, already a bit underclothed. Her head was 'that bothered' with all the new scraps of paper. Her feet were flattening in queues. She never had enough time for her own household jobs. She was dismayed to the pitch of horror by the fall of Singapore and the loss of her great fighting ships. She could hardly believe in the Japanese advance, spreading like a plague over Burma. She was hurt beyond belief by the madness of Congress India and bewildered by the disintegration of much she had thought indestructible. But it never occurred to her that she could be beaten. Of all her fifty million, scarcely one was not at work—in some fashion, mostly hard and unexpected.

That spring I went about—metaphorically open-mouthed—admiring the new England which I cannot describe. All her pretences were stripped. There was no more talk of an easy war or a short one, no more prattle of victorious Germany breaking like a teacup in the hands of a careless housewife.

Lord Kenmare's wonderful film put it clearly when the younger Pitt, Prime Minister and lover of England, said very slowly and so quietly that it might have been a matter of no importance: "We shall win by those last seven days—when our enemy—*exhausted*—will let go and England—*exhausted*—will hang on."

This is what I saw when I returned from Canada—England hanging on. Her splendour was that she could not conceive—and never would be able to conceive—there was anything else to do.

All that spring other nations, allied and enemy, wondered and discussed, criticized, dissected, feared. England saw no cause for any of these preoccupations. She was busy holding on—to win. Hammered out of all consistent thought, she hung on. It was enough. For two hundred years, it had been enough. Perhaps it will always be enough.

As soon as I had finished speaking about Canada to learned and imperial societies in London—under the chairmanship of Sir Jocelyn Lucas and Lady Willingdon, wrist-watch in evidence, lest enthusiasm outrange the prime virtue of brevity, of Lord Bennett, an excellent speaker always quick to the point, of General Sir Alec Godley, a former Governor of Gibraltar, and at the Institute of International Affairs, I paid a visit to 'occupied Britain'.

General Sir George Cory, Inspector of Allied Troops, arranged a comprehensive programme which took me over more of this island than I had seen for a long time.

'Somewhere in Scotland' I became the guest of Norway. It was a stimulating experience.

"Are you hoping for an invasion of Europe this year?" I asked a quiet, fair Norwegian who, with dozens of others, was making pack-saddles in a small Scottish town. "We are more than hoping," he retorted with a rush of enthusiasm, "we claim it."

Three weeks ago this man, an artist in his own country, had learned that his wife was planning an escape to join him—by a fishing-boat across the North Sea. Then came intolerable silence. And at last—another secret message. She had been shot by the Germans.

Against the whitewashed walls of a weather-beaten house were stacked the curved metal frames of Norwegian packsacks which fit snugly above the hips and so adjust a 60-pound load that man can walk or ski all day with a Bren gun or a bomb-throwing mortar on his back.

At the benches, middle-aged Norsemen, long and lean, speechless except for the minimum of words necessary, were making out of leather and metal the equipment needed by mountain troops and saddlery for the small, sturdy ponies, Scottish bred, which will be used on the other side of the North Sea in country where motor transport is impossible.

At this particular 'Norway House' work had been going on all night. "A special order," said the commandant. Eager-eyed girls at their sewing-machines whispered, "Another raid? Or is it this time that we go back—all of us?"

On ordinary days the women, who began by belonging to the Scandinavian Lotte, an adult form of Girl Guides, and are now a version of the A.T.S., work nine and a half hour shifts. They wear khaki overalls, admirably fitting, with a small Norwegian flag on the arm. No lipstick or nail-polish, not even powder! But they are very good-looking, with their shining smooth hair and lovely teeth. All of them can tell tales of hairbreadth escapes.

An elderly woman, wearing the one pair of spectacles in Norway House, told me she had lived for thirty-one years in Spitsbergen in a temperature of thirty to forty below zero, and found Scotland in winter 'too cold for her fingers or her wits'.

When Canadians and Britons seized the island from Germany, de-

stroyed the coal mines and put an end to the menace of another submarine base on a possible supply route to Russia, this woman hoisted the Norwegian flag over her wooden roof, wrapped three pairs of boots and the family Bible in a quilt and ran for the nearest boat. "My husband shot our three goats," she said. "It was sad to lose them, but we should not have liked them to become German."

The total population of Spitsbergen was brought away with the exception of one man, who hid in a disused shaft. "Why?" I asked. "He was mad," they replied. Many of the islanders brought with them silver and blue fox skins. One family had a magnificent polar bear skin salted in a barrel. These they gradually sold.

The real plutocrats, however, were the Norwegian whalers. They brought the whole of their fleet from the Antarctic, including the big 'factory-ships' which make up to two thousand five hundred barrels of oil a day.

One town, canny and cautious, accustomed to saving its pennies, has not yet recovered from the shock of meeting hard, wind-bitten whaling captains earning a hundred thousand Norwegian kröne for a nine months' voyage. Breathlessly the tale is repeated of a sun-blackened sailor in three thicknesses of jersey, who hailed the last taxi on a local rank, and upon being told he must take the first, hired them all, flung himself into the one he had chosen, and ordered the whole procession to drive in front of him to the river dock.

I asked about conditions in Norway, and was told, "In Oslo most people have not seen meat for six months, and the bread contains a lot of cellulose which makes it so noisy for the digestion. We have a joke about it now in Norway, for we ask our friends, 'Have you heard much bread to-day?'"

"What do you miss most this side?" I asked. Several girls answered at once, "Our families, of course, but after them the sun, and—if it weren't war-time—fish and milk." The men said, "Boots—real boots."

The commandant explained, "We are a very old nation, you know, and we've had about nine hundred years' experience in making boots which are tough and soft at the same time and which fit so that your feet are never tired." Comically he looked at his British army boots. "With these it's like walking about in trunks," he said. "We find it difficult to get used to such strangers."

A woman said, "I miss education. We Norwegians all learn to mend and darn and patch and do embroidery as beautifully as any shop over here, and our mothers teach us how to cook properly. We must learn a large number of dishes and all about housekeeping before we think of getting a husband."

I asked, "Well, what do you like over here?"

"Seeing animals out of doors all the year round. With us, cattle and horses and everything have to be shut up all winter. And seeing

so few holes really in the towns which the Germans said they had bombed down——”

A woman in well-cut uniform interrupted, “And pigs’ trotters! The Scots butchers keep them for us now. But yesterday I made a great mistake. I said to a very serious butcher, ‘Have you any pigs’ trousers to-day?’”

When Germany swept into Norway, all the gold the country possessed was saved, and the whole Norwegian merchant fleet, third largest and most modern in the world, with thirty thousand sailors, made straight for British ports. That fleet has lost a million tons working and fighting for the Allied cause, but it still has several million left. The Norwegian Government pays for the whole of its war effort, now based in Britain. It maintains its own schools and hospitals, builds its own ships and camps, makes its equipment, clothes, arms and pays its forces.

When Quisling took over synthetic government in Oslo, he wrote to Stockholm suggesting an agreed delay in payment of the interest on Norway’s loan from Sweden. He was told that King Haakon’s Government in London had already paid the current year’s and had guaranteed all future instalments.

Norwegian pilots, most of whom ask for news of ‘Little Norway’ in Toronto, were bombing Germany and German occupied Europe. Norwegian women were tailoring uniforms. Their men were training in the roughest country Scotland can produce.

I visited a camp in a beechwood where neatly laid pine branches covered the muddiest ground. On the mess door was scrawled a regretful ‘Plenty of chips but no fish’. Norwegian cooks provided a sweet, pink soup with raisins and rice in it, and an excellent stew. Real coffee followed. The major solemnly handed round a bottle of cod-liver oil and one of vitamin pills.

Subsequently we watched recruits drilling. But modern ‘drill’ is a process of ruthlessly practical toughening.

Out of a crowd of stalwart, solid young giants, some told me of their escapes. A sergeant, a salesman in Bergen before the war, had been nine months on the way. With a Robin Hood band, numbering forty-seven, he had taken to the forests and lived on what they could shoot or trap till they reached the Swedish frontier. Then, alternately tramping and by ‘hard class’ on the Russian trains through Finland to Moscow, they had made their way down to Odessa on the Black Sea. “There we got a fine Danish boat and saw lots of Germans in occupation of Varna” (the Bulgarian port where King Boris had a summer palace), “but they didn’t take us off, so we got to Syria all right, had a few unofficial fights and were bombed in the Mediterranean by one Italian plane and one French—perhaps with a German pilot—we shot down both. We were hit ourselves in the forward hold and we stood by the lifeboats all one night.

"But we made Suez and were quickly arrested by the Egyptians and stuck in a prison camp with five thousand Italians. Not for long though, and when we came out we were put on board a very old liner and sent off with some torpedoed Norwegian crews to the Cape. There all the sailors, and any who thought they knew about boats, were asked to volunteer for mine-sweepers in the Mediterranean. The rest of us started up the Atlantic. We were mighty glad to get to Canada, I can tell you. I had three months' training there before I came across to Scotland. About eight thousand miles I'd done altogether."

"The most expensive recruit the Norwegian army has ever had," said the camp commandant.

Two lads of eighteen and nineteen explained that the record for crossing the North Sea in a small boat is twenty-one hours. They had tried to escape with a score of others last winter, but they had got into a bad storm, and after nine days, with only a few sardines apiece, for their bread had been swamped, the boat capsized. They were picked up by a Norwegian smack and landed near their own village, to the horror of their families. But the Gestapo happened to be busy elsewhere. There were no shootings or torture. And the lads got away again last month.

"We were spotted by a German reconnaissance plane when we were eighteen hours out and four still to go till dark—so we thought a fighter plane would come out and machine-gun the lot of us. Fortunately mist came down."

"How did you get a boat?" I asked.

The boys winked. "We don't know," said one. "And we don't tell anyone we're going, not even our families. So nobody can suffer."

The other youth said, "If there was a bridge over the North Sea, every Norwegian would come across to you." He added, "But they expect you back this summer. They're counting on it."

CHAPTER XXXVI

Scotland, 1942

The Poles Make War an Adventure

By 1942, Scotland had 'gone foreign' and was proud of it. Whole counties seemed to be occupied—as well as defended—by Poles. Their cooking appeared in small, prim village inns. Their mounted police, huge, blond men in crash helmets, patrolled the roads. Their trucks and tanks, wonderfully camouflaged, were curiously shaped hummocks in fields or farmyards—when they were not tearing full pace over the hills toward mysterious 'prohibited areas'.

One morning early I set off—by very special permission—in a camouflaged army car, with some Poles and a British liaison officer, 'to see the sights'. Our driver was a Canadian girl in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry. She had just signed on to go abroad—when necessary—with a Polish division. "I hope it'll be soon," she said. "We're all far more than ready."

First we had something of a race with a truckload of Canadian foresters, the maple leaf on their sleeves. They are called 'Woodpeckers' over here. Experts in forestry, they know far more about trees than our people, so they are entrusted with essential timber supplies for camps, barracks and factories. "They can be counted on to cut the right trees and leave the others alone," said the Briton on the front seat. He was justifiably rueful, for he had lost a flowering cherrywood by mistake—careless, commercial cutting.

Craning out of the window as we swept through a huddled grey town with a crumbling castle showing four-hundred-year-old marks of cannon balls, I saw Free French sailors, with their caps at a gay angle, and Dutch merchant seamen in lots of jerseys. Very stalwart and reliable the Hollanders looked—silent, serious, intent on their own business. Farther on, we saw Dutch airmen handling their big bombers. One was badly scarred, with a hole in the fuselage, but she circled down and made a perfect landing.

"It's just one night's flight from this place to Warsaw—do you realize that?" said the Pole. He added, "I wonder how many nights our reconnaissance pilots fly over, and what news, what instructions they are dropping over my country this week or next week, every week perhaps."

At a barrier, military police, their motor-cycles stacked in a ditch, demanded our passes. Empty roads stretched ahead of us. There was no civilian traffic. Miles and miles of ploughed land, where there used to be grass and heather, promised food for next winter.

The Pole continued: "To us, war is still an excitement. To you English, it is boredom and the disturbance of all your habits. To the French it is a terrifying anxiety." He laughed. "You must make war gay and adventurous."

We passed a village hall, with posters announcing a dance for the troops—in three languages. Scotland must be surprised at her own new internationalism.

Contrary to the Norwegians, who think our standard of life and education lamentably low, the Pole thought we were thorough-going modernists. He commented, "Your world is certainly turning upside down. It used to be the castle people who had a good time, and the hard-working villagers who practised thrift and stayed at home. Now they go out five nights a week, dancing, 'cinemas, dog-racing, while the large country houses go to bed exhausted after listening to the nine o'clock news. I've been billeted in some of them, so I know."

We turned into a park with a few big trees left standing. This was the Polish parachute troops' training ground, known as the 'monkey grove'.

In the grove I watched men fitted with parachute harness being swung up from a platform over the highest tree branches. In mid-air they learned to manage the slings and to turn about so that they could always land facing the wind. "You must see what sort of country is coming toward you," explained a round-faced, laughing lieutenant who had made over two hundred jumps, mostly in battle. Where, in earlier centuries, halberdiers and archers had defended their land, the Poles had built a metal tower. It looked like an enormous derrick on an oil-field, about two hundred feet high. "Would you like to try a jump from the top of it?" suggested my escort. "Not at all," I replied firmly, as I watched young men, agile as squirrels, run up the skeleton staircase, attach the harness of a controlled parachute, and slide off the top. A jerk as the eighty yards of flapping silk tightened under the strain! Then the paratroopist appeared to be sitting comfortably in mid-air as he descended, holding the ropes as if they belonged to a swing. But it was necessary to land in a bundle and roll over on to your feet. "Every bit of the body should touch the ground, but the muscles must be completely relaxed," explained the instructor, who had come down without any harness, holding the parachute rings and turning a succession of cartwheels.

"Try it!" said everybody. "Such fun! You'll love it!"

"This is my only good tweed," I retorted, "and I've used all my coupons for stockings. I walk about now in holes—and I'll make a lot more rolling on the ground."

At that, of course, they produced dungarees and a scarf to tie over my head. I was terrified, looking over the tower edge. "It's much easier dropping out of a plane, because you don't see anything at all," said someone.

Rigidly I slid into space. A second or two—which seemed like an hour—and the jerk I knew would come sent my middle towards my chin. Then I caught the ropes and floated. But I had only just time to think how agreeable clouds must feel, when the ground came up and bumped me hard. For of course I had forgotten all about landing on my feet and immediately rolling over into a huddle. Everybody rushed to pick me up and disentangle me and dust me.

"I expect you'd like to try again, wouldn't you?"

"No," I said, this time with iron firmness, while I removed a good deal of field from my hair and my face.

"Of course it is better to keep your mouth shut," said a cheerful expert, offering his handkerchief.

We left the 'monkey grove' and headed for the coast.

The next excitement was a fishing village which I had known for years dreaming beside a quiet sea. There used to be nets hung on the

beach and a smell of dried mackerel, a few patched sails on the skyline, women in thick boots and dark, shapeless clothes, making oatcake or shortbread, lads in home-knitted jerseys. To-day the village has an 'umbrella' of sausage balloons, and in the half-moon harbour I saw an enormous convoy made up of small, tough freighters and destroyers. How far across the world had they come? Nobody knew.

At last we came to the frontier where Poland and Scotland joined forces. Here watch is kept day and night.

In the Christmas-tree woods we saw tanks and armoured trucks hidden under branches.

Towards the coast we drove and came eventually to waste sand and a host of hutments. We were stopped among neat rows of cabbages, strange contrast to all the other preparations for total and most savage war. In spite of our passes, sentries would not let us move till the officer commanding this sea post appeared. "You've chosen a good moment," he said. "Dutch bomber pilots are practising on an aeroplane shape on the ground over there and heavy artillery is just about coming into action in the opposite direction."

Over rough wilderness between mines and wire, we rolled towards the sea.

An Air Force sentry challenged us, as bombers dived across our heads to drop their load—with admirable precision—on to a shape outlined among sandhills. We could not hear ourselves speak because of the big guns' thunder. Above it, we shouted. Much we saw that cannot be described. Then tea was provided—and we talked about Narvik where the Poles had fought. "Love and war," said an enormous man. "What else would you have?"

There had been more than three hundred marriages between Polish soldiers and Scottish girls in that district. A new Polish legion was fighting in Russia. "Our men were so glad to fight again they kissed the rifles provided by the Soviet," said a major who had had no news of his family for two years.

South I travelled when I left the Poles—with several chips off my heart, of course, for they are the *most* delightful and entertaining race, heart-breakingly courageous without an idea that men can be anything else.

Somewhere in Western England I met the Belgians. On a hillside in fitful sunshine, Flemish soldiers who had crossed the world to fight—either for their own country or for an ideal of world freedom—told me their stories.

I talked with a man who looked like an American. He had been educated at a United States university, had taken a science fellowship and qualified in surgery and general anaesthetics. He is now a private in a mechanized unit.

"Why—exactly?" I asked.

He answered: "I'm not so much interested in Belgium, although

I was born there and all my family live in Brussels, but I like freedom. I like the idea of separate, individual nations with their own languages and ambitions and purposes. I'm fighting for all that."

"Where will you live after the war, Belgium or America?" I asked.

"Oh, I couldn't exist in Europe. I must be somewhere on the American continent, but maybe it'll be Canada. I've always wanted to try my luck there. It's big enough and I like space—and I don't want any Nazis in my bit of space."

The staff officer with me had come from Montevideo, pleasure city of South America, where three-fifths of the total population of Uruguay live. He was a curt, smart young man and had been a building contractor. He said, "Uruguay is very advanced in social theory and practice. It would be a workers' paradise if there were enough work to go round. I got tired of the mess the Nazis are making even out there and thought I'd take a hand against them."

"As a Belgian?"

"No. As a citizen of the world. I hate Nazi lies and Nazi intrigue. They are all over South America—underground."

The physical training instructor had been a works inspector in the Argentine, and the padre, veteran of the last war, in which, at sixteen and a half, he had fought with bayonet and grenade, came from Santa Lucia in the Caribbean.

There were Légionnaires from Morocco and the scarlet southern deserts. The acting quartermaster spoke five languages every day. His office was a hut roofed with canvas, and he dealt with men who had fought in small, forgotten wars on the edge of Africa, or with men who had won commercial battles and ten-figure incomes in the Americas. They were all Belgians by birth and privates in her new army of assault.

After lunch, the colonel said, "We have a surprise for you. Our big guns are exercising. You shall fire one of them."

In an immense armoured truck, standing up, peering out of the hole in the roof—with guns below and beside me, an anti-aircraft one trained skywards—I was driven over the country, ignoring roads.

I held on tight until we arrived at the hill from which 25-pounders, such as Canada makes at Sorel, would fire blank. We extracted ourselves, at the expense of my precious stockings.

"Put these in your ears," said the colonel, handing me two rubber plugs on a string, "and remember to keep your mouth open. Look—you just touch this handle when I give the order to fire, but you must keep your elbow stiff. Don't let it touch any part of the gun because of the recoil."

Efficient gunners—with their mouths open—looked at me with scorn. There seemed to me an awful lot of gun to avoid touching. Loading was unimaginably quick. "No. 1 gun ready, sir," intoned an N.C.O. "No. 1 gun—fire," ordered the colonel.

With immense—unnecessary—violence I pressed a small brass handle

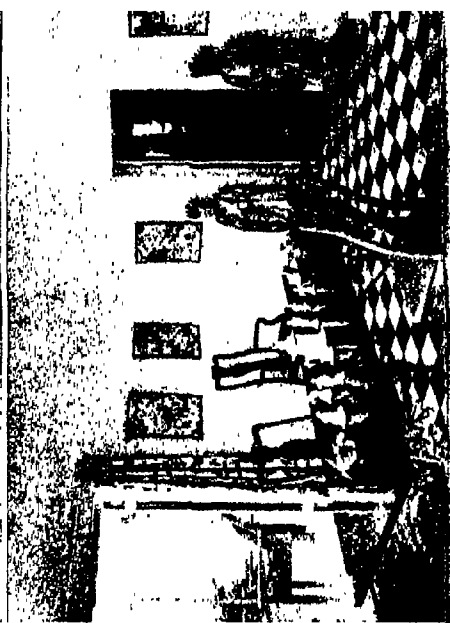
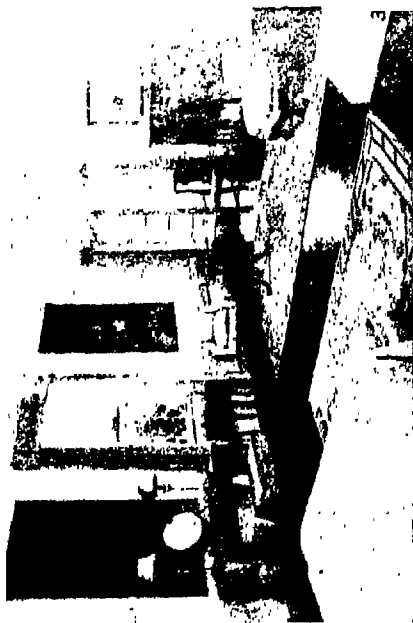


1. Autumn at home.
2. Unicorn Cay grown up.
3. Towards Culiner Rocks.
4. 'Adam' in Eden.

"APPOINTMENT
WITH DESTINY"—
1945

*Photos:
Stanley Tongood, A.R.P.S.*





1. The front of Unicorn Cay.

2. The Courtyard.

3. My bedroom.

4. The dining-room.

"POSSESSIONS ARE GAOLERS AND HABITS PRISON WALLS..."

Pilot: Stanley Tugwood, A.R.P.S.

light as a trigger. I resisted a decided temptation to shut my eyes. The noise was not nearly so prodigious as I expected. But immediately behind the gun, there was a strong blast which tore off my Canadian hat—known to all my Toronto friends as ‘the angry doughnut’. Handling it as if it were an empty shell-case, the sergeant returned it.

“That was an emotion for you, yes?” asked my Belgian friends. “Decidedly,” I said, wondering how many irreplaceable hairpins I had lost and hoping the Czechs next day would spare me all forms of violent exercise.

The Czechs did. But they taught me—more than any other of our Allies in Britain—exactly where Germany went wrong. For they introduced me to Sokol. This is the system Hitler ought to have followed to perfect the youth he worships, instead of mass-educating boys and girls for death—their own deaths, and millions of other people’s deaths as well.

Sokol is more than a Czech national institution, including men, women, young people and children. It is an ideal of physical and mental fitness. Its amazing and superb gymnastic display in 1938 was given by twenty-eight thousand people of all ages from eighteen to sixty. All were perfectly drilled. They had defeated time and depression. They were the healthiest and happiest people I have ever seen. “We all belong to Sokol families,” they explained.

There was no secret about this modern league to harden the bodies of ordinary people, to make and keep them fit by strengthening their nerves and muscles, training them in self-control, voluntary discipline and moral strength. Beginning with children, schoolboys and school-girls, Sokol inspired the new generation—our own to-day—to struggle for a worthy independence, to improve wits as well as sinews and to believe in a great international brotherhood of mutual understanding and appreciation.

The movement was spreading among the Slavs of central and eastern Europe when Germany seized Prague and put an end to everything progressive. Sokol goes on in Czechoslovakia underground. Its gallant adherents are responsible for much of the sabotage which wrecks trains, disables factory machinery, short-circuits electric power, blows up roads, destroys telegraph and telephone apparatus, slows down production and delivery by a superlatively ingenious system of ‘errors’.

I talked with a Canadian Czech who—in battle-school—had just swum a river with rifle and full equipment—the latter dry. He said, “It’s grand. There’s no pretence about these exercises. They’re the real thing.”

An officer said, “The Germans have been able to give their men nearly three years of the best training—war. We can’t do that yet. But we’re getting as near it as we can.”

Historic English houses which had been owned by the same families

since the Domesday Book were barracks. The most wonderful gardens in the world were 'battle schools'. Parks with velvet-smooth turf had lost their deer in favour of sunken gun-pits, realistically covered with gorse. I saw a totally new England.

In what used to be a pleasant wood, sacred to fox-hunting, I saw a host of armoured vehicles, each of them in its own parking-place, under such cunningly arranged effect of trees and bushes that even from the ground it was hard to spot them.

On a windy hillside I stood, looking down on a famous golf course. "See anything?" asked a staff officer.

Puzzled, I replied, "It's changed—the bunkers seem to be more irregular, and surely the fairways are shorter."

"There's a whole battalion there in front of you in open formation—on camouflage exercise."

I stared and still saw nothing. Occasionally a branch stirred or the sun caught broken mounds and clumps of broom. Then a whistle blew. And—literally—the earth got up. The trees walked. What I had imagined shadows detached themselves and became men. I had been looking straight at several hundred soldiers with curiously streaked, smeared and splashed camouflage shirts over their battle-dress and anything they thought would be effective—mud, grass, twigs—spattered over the rest of them.

"Not a bad show, what?" said the colonel. "We could open your eyes a lot more if there was time. Don't you trust any 'deserted moor' or 'empty fields' these days! Bound to be something underneath."

On I travelled and next day came to 'Orange-occupied England'. The glowing symbol of the popular royal house of the Netherlands became familiar.

Holland has always been one of the best colonizers since ancient Rome. Whether in Java or in Curaçao—biggest oil refinery in the 'American' seas—she built her houses as permanent homes. Her camps in England have the same air of stability. No makeshift, round-backed huts for the burghers and farmers and merchants who have rallied round the House of Orange in England.

All these men, training determinedly as infantry or mechanics because their country needs an army, long to be sailors or airmen. "We really are not born soldiers," said one of their C.O.s. "We prefer the sea." But they are born builders.

When I saw their camp, I said, "You are colonizing England as thoroughly as the Netherlands Indies." For plantations were rapidly growing. Soon they would provide a windscreen for the admirably planned brick and wooden buildings. There were tulips to remind the Dutch of their fields of flowers across the North Sea.

Someone had said, "We have so many windmills in Holland, we must have at least one here." So a gaily painted toy mill had been erected beside the broad main drive. The only thing lacking was a

herd of black and white cows such as decorate the usual Dutch landscape.

In a gale from the hills, with camouflaged planes roaring overhead, I watched Dutch volunteers and reservists doing bayonet drill with the expressions of men who remembered and would avenge Rotterdam. I saw recruits who had only been a short time in England learning to train an anti-aircraft gun on a moving target which represented a plane.

"Twelve degrees in front of her nose. That's where you must aim," said the sergeant. "Try it, miss!" I did, and was much impressed with myself when I contrived, after many blunders, to 'hit', with the spotlight attached to my gun, a toy bomber manoeuvring along a wire.

But it was no game for the Dutchmen whose ages ranged from seventeen to close on sixty. The latter would be transport drivers and clerks in ordnance stores. A fifty-four-year-old N.C.O., who had lived in Paris, married there, and fled to join the Foreign Legion in 1939 because he knew there would be war and thought this the surest way of getting into it, told me: "I was determined to be a parachutist, but I knocked out my ankle first jump. Now I'm all right again, and as soon as I've trained the last lot of A.A.C. gunners here, I'm going to try again. No—of course I'm not too old! I was in France in June, 1940, when Laval-minded officers made off, and the boys, deprived of leadership, mostly followed them. The Mayor of ——— appealed to some of us older fellows to put up a show against the Nazis. And I can tell you we did it. We lost 70 per cent of our lot before we had to leg it!"

There were a lot of Dutch-Canadians and South Africans in that camp. In a comfortably furnished mess, with armchairs round the open brick fireplace, blue and white Delft jars along the walls, I talked with a dozen men who among them had travelled close on a hundred thousand miles to join Holland's battle-line in Britain. One was a Johannesburg butcher, another a young Palestine Jew, a third a scientist from Brazil who had been experimenting with 'bugs'.

I asked my usual question: "What brought you here?" But this time the answer was always the same. "Rotterdam," they said.

CHAPTER XXXVII

England, 1942

Balloon Command

THAT SPRING OF 1942, before the Air Ministry and the War Office sent me to lecture to the forces, I was writing about work and workers in Britain for Canada's enterprising *Toronto Star*.

So I travelled up and down and crossways over the country, standing in swaying corridors, sitting on my suitcase or on large-booted military feet. No journeys in the wilderness were ever—to me—so exhausting as those in crazily crowded English trains with rifles, kit-bags, market baskets, dogs, vegetables and chain-smokers heaped up in every space. It seemed that all Britain travelled. Women—un-kempt and furred in spite of the weather—discussed the landscape they had never previously seen, and the bargains for which they hoped in the next market town. Their husbands were working full shifts. For the first time in their lives—or since the last war—they had money to spend. But there was little to buy. So they sought it all over the neighbourhood, travelling as much as they could. It was pathetic, it was also trying. Out of these human swarms I extracted myself—or was forcibly pushed—at the appropriate station. Helpful hands, their bodies lost in the crush, thrust a suitcase after me, sometimes the wrong one.

While I was still trying to shake and smooth myself into some semblance of the uncrumpled assurance I would have liked to present, a charming girl in Air Force blue or A.T.S. khaki, unruffled, imperturbable, enormously successful it seemed to me, would select me from the chaos on the platform and—with a smart salute—translate me into a pill box car. Off we would go to visit some form of military activity. And for the first miles I would feel as if I did not fit anywhere or belong to myself at all. Then the driver's assurance and her polite assumption that 'distinguished visitors' could not be expected to arrive without missing buttons, or holes in their stockings, restored my confidence. Surreptitiously I would straighten my hat, rub the impact of other people's packages—animal or vegetable—off my face and put on the expression most suited to the Air Marshal or General I expected to meet.

Sir Leslie Gossage—in charge of Balloon Command—took me round the colossal training station which dealt with a thousand W.A.A.F.s at a time. "I thought it was just the sort of job girls would like," explained the Air Marshal. "They're used to looking after things—houses, kitchens, dogs, children, husbands. So why not balloons? I called for two hundred and sixty volunteers from among the fabric-workers, and I got every woman who wanted an open-air life—masses of them. For the first experiment we picked out the best-tempered, for balloons need managing like ships and horses."

Impressed, I listened and took notice. Flat green fields, surprised cows, a wind—there is always a wind in that part of England—factories surprisingly striped and spotted, acres of neat brown huts on the ground and the whole sky full of balloons. That is what I saw.

If the sun broke fitfully between the clouds, it was like being at the bottom of an aquarium. For all sorts and shapes of balloons, some thoroughly inflated, gambolled like porpoises, others thin as camels

after a fortnight without water, small, neat, streamlined creatures intended for the protection of ships, and the fat-finned blimps familiar to every Londoner, filled the air.

"Can you tell them apart?" I asked the young Rhodesian officer—a girl with the right shade of lipstick—who accompanied me. "By expression," she retorted, "not by shape."

Away we drove into a flat, farming England. A flock of sheep blocked the lane. Land-girls, very solid in their breeches, were weeding in ploughed fields.

Then we turned through a heavy gate. Policemen, sentries with fixed bayonets. A row of camouflaged cars imitating ant-heaps. New, capable buildings. But everything looked like something else. Girls drilling. Girls marching. Girls hurrying to classes and duty stations. The largest girls I have ever seen and the healthiest! They were all in strong dark blue overalls, with solid battle-dress, like a man's, underneath.

A squadron officer took me into a hut. Clean and scrubbed, neatly packed as a cabin it was. No luxury. The beds were just iron bunks in pairs, arranged one above the other. The pillows were the usual army issue. The blankets were those which soldiers use. There was a mat beside each pair of beds, sometimes a gay striped coverlet from an American comforts fund, and always flowers or branches in jars.

On the narrow shelf round the plank walls were ranged the girls' boots—solid, waterproof, the footwear of a fighting man, including rubber knee-boots. Below these hung the official issue of clothing: greatcoats, battle-dress, overalls, sweater and cardigan, decontamination kit, camouflaged to look like field foliage, sou'wester and stiff black oilskins.

Always, winter and summer, through snow or mud, they go to unheated, outside bath-huts.

"Do you often wash?" I asked with shivering sympathy—on a war site. A delightful blonde corporal—gay as a sandpiper—retorted, laughing, "Oh, yes. It's a point of honour to scurry out to the bath-hut, even when we have to break the ice. It's fun, you know. One feels stuffed with pride afterwards."

Among all the seven hundred and seventy girls, I found none with the shadow of a regret. No homesickness. Nothing against the new conscription which was clearing women out of homes, shops and offices and pouring them into the forces or munition plants. It was a revolution, unequalled in history, and it was taking place without any fuss at all.

What is going to happen when peace comes to the million or two women who have become soldiers? Will they go back happily to two little boxes of rooms, content, while their husbands are out working, with the companionship of stove and dustpan? I asked some of the balloon girls. "Not us!" they said. "We want to marry when we've

time, but that isn't a whole-time job. We want to stay with the Air Force. It's so interesting. We're learning an awful lot."

Balloons were evidently popular as a war job.

"They make me laugh," said one girl, "like a toy, you know, but with works that have to be looked after."

"I think they're as good as pets," said another, "but they get into awful tempers. Some days they won't do anything right."

"Bad as children, they are," suggested a third. "You wouldn't imagine the tricks they can play, especially in a wind."

Eleven weeks' training turns the new army class 'conscript' into a fully efficient member of a balloon crew.

For eleven weeks each girl is a number, not a name. As such she is 'batched' into a class of ten under a corporal, and presented with what must seem to her more weight and warmth of kit than a shorn polar bear would need. She is then allotted a bunk with three feet of space above it and a locker underneath. Thereafter, she leads the life Russian youth has known for twenty-five years. She has no privacy and no opportunity to be 'different from the rest'. She is fed, clothed, housed, trained to a job, exercised, doctored, educated in her spare time at the expense of the State. She is turned into a cross between a mechanic and a sailor, with something of a seamstress and a hospital nurse thrown in—for balloons have to be repaired and balloons have to be humoured. The girls I saw were certainly thriving. "We always issue them with overalls two sizes too large," explained the squadron officer, "and there's not an inch unfilled when they leave for war sites."

In the main lecture room, I saw large-size drawings of every portion of balloon and all the tackle needed to work it. Half a dozen classes of girls were listening hard. On a centre table was marked the exact counterfeit of a balloon bed, with every wire, rope and ballast-block in miniature. A model blimp floated above it. The Air Marshal insisted that women learn best from coloured drawings. "Men don't care," he said, "but girls like contrasts and colour schemes. They get along like a house on fire when something catches their eye."

Next came a 'shop' where dozens of girls lined up at benches were learning 'eye-splicing' on wire cables. This was a difficult job and hard on the fingers. But those out-size young women dealt capably and quickly with hammer, anvil, pliers and press. The cables were reparcelled and ready for use. I looked at the girls' hands. They were beginning to harden. Nails were cut to the quick. There were a good many splashes of iodine. In another fortnight—on a practice site—those hands would be tough as sailors'.

Practical balloon handling—in all weathers—completes the girls' training. By this time they know all about pressure-gauges, leak-detectors and purity meters. But they have to put down their own wire flying bed with its complicated equipment of pulleys and hooks, a 'spider' for hauling up the balloon and ballast blocks for mooring it.

We had a discussion sitting on the grass outside a hut, when the shift was over. In front of us loomed the colossal sheds where the practice balloons are 'bedded' at night. A lorry fitted with a winch was hauling a reluctant blimp out of the sky and into the hangar. The sky-dolphin rolled and jumped at the end of the hawser like a hooked sail-fish. "What do you all want to do after the war?"

Most of these muscular young women wanted homes of their own. "But not so much fuss about housework." They thought husbands would have to be content with 'less looking after'. One who had been in a paper-mill before the war said, "It's waste of time, everybody doing their own washing and cooking. There ought to be a new sort of flat with communal kitchen and laundry so that we could all take a turn at serving the whole block and have the other days free for a job."

This is the Russian system. It does not make for good food, but it certainly saves time.

"Women have learned team work for the first time in their lives," said Sir Leslie. "Men have always supposed women couldn't combine to work as a gang. But these girls do. They're tremendously conscientious and quicker in the uptake than a lot of men."

"Discipline?" I queried.

"That depends on the quality of their officers. If an N.C.O. shows she knows the job better than any of the sixteen in her squad, she'll be obeyed all right. But a girl sergeant can't 'put it over' on her personality as a man sometimes can, because he's got an extra share of wits or is a good boxer. She's got to be able to deliver the goods."

Before I left, I saw a balloon flown. We went through the ghostly hangars with their under-sea feeling. Just over our heads and drifting alongside us were huge silver shapes, tier after tier, all moving about on their steel hawsers. There must have been close on a hundred, a few huddled on the floor with the bewildered expressions of big fish forcibly beached. I felt like a diver among a shoal of grandmotherly whales. Balloons are full of character. All they needed was knitting, and they could have sat down like dowagers to make themselves useful!

Out on the practice site a twenty-five mile wind was blowing. The girl corporal gave her orders through a megaphone. Each of the squad standing to attention had a different job. They broke rank and doubled to 'port' and 'starboard'. The balloon hung just off the ground, rudder and fins deflated and tied to the sides. A long pull set them loose. Complicated operations followed with pulleys and hawsers. Into the wind, the balloon turned, nose upwards. Air drove through the venthole into the rudder, and when this was full, up through the 'trousers' connected with the fins.

There was the inevitable moment when—the ballast blocks released—it looked as if a bunch of girls would be carried off their feet. Then the motor-driven winch started working and the huge creature swung into the sky.

I remembered the anxious foreigner who, during London's worst raid, asked a balloon sergeant dealing with charred fragments how high his charge had flown. The only printable fragment of the reply was that a 'ruddy harp' had come down on the hawser.

That night the Thames was a sheet of fire. Blazing oil hid the water. The sky was bright red and against it the barrage balloons flickered in the currents of hot air. High above them, the searchlights stabbed at German planes. Occasionally, lights dropped like a handful of glass balls off a Christmas tree, showing that one of our own fighters was in action. The firemen's hoses were too hot to hold. Rubber and metal melted. Houses fell in heaps, and the noise was less than the roar of flames. One by one the barrage balloons exploded or were shot down. The sky was empty and out of it the bombers dived. But the heat of timber and blazing petrol kept them higher than at Rotterdam. And before they could attempt machine-gunning, other balloons flew.

That night we had one gun for every hundred now in action. Something comparable might have happened if Hitler had invaded England, but there would have been airwomen in charge of the balloon barrage. The girls I saw training in blue battle-dress would be wardens of the skies. Those twenty-year-olds and younger would face the German attack. Cool and unhesitating, with less fuss than they make over coupons in spring, they would keep the barrage up to strength.

"Women don't realize they're in danger till they're out of it, and you'll never get them to acknowledge a thing's impossible," said the O.C. station. He added, "There's an awful lot done just by not knowing it's impossible."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

England, 1942

Night on a Bomber Station

ONE NIGHT I spent on a bomber aerodrome with Air Vice-Marshal Baldwin,¹ whom I had last seen in India, when both of us were very young and mainly interested in horses. We could not then have imagined the circumstances which we would share—on a clear, spring night, near the flat east coast of England more than twenty years later.

We dined in a big country house, which Headquarters shared with the owner. It was full of racing trophies and the loveliest old furniture, undisturbed by war. On the same landing I met a centuries-old

¹ Now Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin.

grandfather clock tinkling a tune about shepherdesses, and a W.A.A.F., orderly, efficient, smart, earnest, who asked me if I would like a camp-bed for a few hours or would I sit up in the control room?

At dinner—peas from the garden and that already rare bird, a chicken—we talked of the ponies we had ridden, the 'jack' we had hunted, the nights through which we had danced in Lucknow a few months after I had married Ronald Forbes and Jack Baldwin invented my first perplexities.

Just before dark we went off to see the gigantic Wellingtons ready to raid Germany. A number of them stood about on what seemed to be waste ground. There was not enough light to see the aerodrome. The enormous shapes towered out of what had been good partridge land. I had toiled over such ground often behind the guns, when Arthur and I stayed in Cambridgeshire with the lovely redhead, Mary Cunningham-Reid, at Six Mile Bottom, which she inherited from her grandfather, Sir Ernest Cassel, friend and mentor of King Edward. What fun we had had, for Mary mixed into her parties a judicious combination of politicians, film-stars, witless lovelies, earnest young men with missions, diplomatists with secrets, portentous foreigners with intentions, and elegant creatures with fancies. The only person who had nothing at all—except a beautiful wife—was an uncending youth without a chin whose name, very suitably, I cannot remember.

Into a Wellington, that quiet night which was so disastrous to Germany, I climbed—to see what it was like. Very high up, I thought. Already the earth was divorced. Bigger than a caravan, it seemed to me, with something of a ship's engine-room—the modern kind where the last thing you see is an engine. In a few hours that machine might be over Berlin. There was nothing I could say. The whole thing was in another dimension.

A pilot explained the uses of the most obvious levers and dials. I wished him luck. I would like to have given him my St. Christopher which has travelled with me for ten years. But he had one of his own. The two might have quarrelled. Saints, I understand, are particular about their patronage.

On we went, in the gathering dark, to another aerodrome, where from a ledge outside the control room we saw bombers take off for the Baltic. One by one, grey, ghostly moths, they swept along the ground, a riding-light at one wing-tip. I thought of the strange night-creatures of the jungle, with a lamp carried under their tails or phosphorescence brushed across their bodies. The bombers went straight off on their familiar course. Their lights were extinguished as soon as they were clear of the aerodrome. When the last had reached its highway—the sky—there was silence. I felt miserable. Jack Baldwin said, "This is the worst moment, and it goes on till they begin to come back. Then one can help—a bit—sometimes—with directions. We can't speak to them on the way out."

The W.A.A.F.s gave me a bed in their quarters. On it I lay for some hours. I did not sleep. In darkness, somebody knocked at the door. "They should be over the target now. You'd better come and have coffee. We may get some news soon."

Nobody spoke much while we disposed of large, hot cupsfuls. The girls were tense and strained. The minds of most, I think, were hundreds of miles away, with 'their' squadron over enemy country. Every W.A.A.F. I met identified herself completely with the unit to which she was attached. There was nothing she would not do to add—by a fraction—to the efficiency of the flights which went out, night after night, across the North Sea. No hours were too long for her. The only reward she wanted was a full count as the dawn broke—"None of our planes are missing."

In silence we went back to the control room. The staff there had been up all night. As yet there was nothing to report. No plane had been obliged to return with engine trouble.

We waited. Then the first message came—a request for direction. It was given—and repeated. More voices spoke, as if they were in our ears. C for Charlie had been hit. He did not think he could 'make it'. He was over neutral country. He was losing height. None of the crew were wounded—to speak of! That covers a lot. For the R.A.F. does not speak if, by any means, it can avoid doing so. With a lump in our chests we waited. C for Charlie 'made it'—a bit of an omelette—but he had landed. He was 'winding up now'. "So long!"

The rest of the bombers came home. Round and round above the aerodrome—at different heights—they circled, waiting for authority to land. We watched their lights—stars shaken from their setting and fussing because they could not find their way back to heaven!

The last bomber spoke—surprised. "Hello, there's an enemy fighter aft! No! My mistake. It's a twin-engined star!"

Impetuously a Pole repeated his demand to land. He was told to go on circling at so many thousand feet. "I do not understand English," he said with perfection of accent. "I am coming down *now*."

"That's the worst of them," sighed an operator. "They won't wait—except for an enemy—and it isn't exactly 'waiting' they do then."

In the briefing-room I listened to the accounts given by the returned pilots. They vouchsafed nothing. It was patiently hooked out of them by the Intelligence Officer examining.

While I was listening to the laconic messages from the middle of the North Sea, or from skies torn and battered—on fire over enemy guns—I had imagined myself in touch with Olympus. The half-gods talked out of the night—from the threshold of high heaven.

I expected outsize men looking like the things they had done.

Into the room came small, quiet figures in grey-blue. Capless now, with ruffled hair, stained sometimes with oil, grey-faced as lads after an all-night party but no more, they shuffled up to the table as if it were the worst they would have to face.

"Did you find the target all right?" A nod—and possibly a "Yes—it was pretty clear."

"Did you have any trouble?"

Young, tired voices invariably said, "Nothing more'n usual." The Intelligence Officer then extracted what had really happened.

They could not talk, or they would not talk, these men who went out two or three nights a week to 'plaster' German industry. Occasionally, one said, "They got the goods all right," and looked as uncomfortable as if he had told the whole story of his life.

He and his fellows were certainly not Olympian in appearance or in speech, but they were of as elect a company. Their habits of thought, their disillusiones and fears, their ideas, superstitions and a specialized code of behaviour they share with nobody who is not of their order. These are the ordinary men who would have been clerks and shop-assistants, engine-drivers and bank-tellers, accountants and mechanics in village garages, chemists and architectural draughtsmen and—who knows?—boot-makers and grooms and hairdressers. Instead, they have taken the skies and held them. In August, 1940, they—and their like—saved England. Now they are destroying Germany. It is all very puzzling. Why do not men look like their deeds? Or do not their deeds matter in comparison with their characters? But they do not look like these either. So modern life is a complicated structure, with illogical expectations for the girders, hopes for the masonry, pretences for the mortar. We really can do nothing with it. For our upbringing has left us unarmed. We were provided with principles, unattainable in present conditions, with an exaggerated sensibility which makes it impossible for us to keep any idea of proportion and enough trained intelligence to realize the justice both of our fears and our doubts. Fortunately, in emergencies, we revert to the quality of our unthinking ancestors of whom, generally, we disapprove.

After seeing bombers on the way to Germany, the Army decided I must also see what it proposed to do to that misguided country. General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, then commanding in western England, invited me to visit a Battle School in the Welsh mountains. So I went down to Chester and stayed at Government House which afforded a generous welcome to everyone with a war-purpose. It was a delight to be—even for a day or two between speeches—in a well-run house with flowers and matching breakfast trays, real linen sheets and an occasional egg.

Lady Marshall-Cornwall is like a Watteau drawing, framed by Molyneux. Her housecraft is perfect. It was amusing staying with her and talking to Lord and Lady Coke just returned from Egypt

—via the Cape and the West Indies, to Sir Alan Cunningham about Abyssinia, and to the local magnates about themselves. So, for an evening, I looked back to the upholstered and well-labelled life which has been swept into the dustbin.

Next morning the General offered me his tin hat and informed me—with a twinkle—that he had instructed Colonel Graham to report my ‘reactions under fire’. Alarmed, I got into the staff car. Off we went, into Wales.

An hour or two later we were on a mountain-side—thick coated, our feet stoutly shod. I had not yet taken to the tin hat.

“From Southern Ireland the Germans have invaded Wales.”

A sunburned, lean young captain in battle-dress, a sweat-rag round his neck, the ‘flash’ of a famous Welsh regiment between his shoulders, was explaining the day’s ‘exercise’.

“You must imagine that the enemy has been in occupation of the coastal mountains for some weeks. They are now being dislodged. We thought our artillery had cleared the area, but this morning early the Home Guard came up against a pocket of resistance and got pretty badly shot up.”

Unsmiling, the instructor continued his tale. “Their officer was wounded, but he managed to report to a platoon commander in the village that a German company with considerable fire power was occupying two wired positions commanding the valley.”

With a bare, brown arm, shirt-sleeve rolled to the shoulder, he gestured towards a crest marked with blue balloons, and to a ruin lower down, an eighth of a mile from the ridge.

“The positions are mutually supporting. Each can cover the other,” he explained. “But we are going to attack simultaneously from two directions. We have a detachment of 3-in. mortars to cover our advance. They will make a smoke-screen—the wind’s in the right direction.”

Solemnly we listened. A brigadier asked questions. A staff colonel offered me his own tin hat. The C.O. of the Battle School, established in a grey, stone-built village under the slope of our highest mountain, informed us that the attacking force would be armed with tommy-guns, 2-in. mortars, rifles for throwing bombs, and a Bangalore torpedo for cutting the enemy’s barbed wire.

He was a very quiet man, with quality and character to spare. Strongly built, rather short, middle-aged, his hand bleeding from an explosion which had blown down part of a wall, he stood beside us explaining the object of the new assault training.

“Men come to us,” he said, “who’ve never fired a live round, and we send them back battle-proof.”

By this time there was so much noise that further speech was difficult. The double advance, one party hidden by boulders and bracken in the creek, the other, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, just visible as the

men scrambled from cover to cover, taking advantage of every overhanging ledge, was supported by fire-parties strategically hidden.

The 'enemy' presumably was replying with the utmost effect! Bombs exploded all round. They were real bombs, which blew large holes in the moorland and spattered us with rock and earth.

Real tracer bullets flashed over—and on occasions *between*—our heads. For the snipers, carefully hidden behind walls or among tussocks of coarse grass, were intrigued by the sight of a woman among the group of staff officers watching the battle.

They were excellent shots, but out to make the 'red tabs' jump. In this agreeable pastime they failed, but that night I brushed out of my hair surprised beetles and a good deal of other matter which exploding 'seventy-threes' had thrown up over us.

As the attackers clambered out of their creek and in open formation raced up a fairly stiff slope, the 3-in. mortars came into action. Their range may be 275 to 1,600 yards. And they certainly make battle beautiful. Their great star-shaped explosions of smoke high in the air spread into octopus clouds, the tentacles swarming and growing until a white mass drifted up right across the (enemy) position.

Then the two attacking parties converged, struggling up-wind over very rough ground. We followed. "Look out where you step. We've had a few duds this morning. Some don't go off in this spongy marsh-land."

For a few minutes we dutifully watched our feet—it would be unpleasant to step on a live bomb—while we panted after the attacking force.

But a Battle School quickly achieves its purpose. The difficulty soon enough is to make the men take cover at all. They get as accustomed to bombs as fire-fighters on the London docks. Climbing a wall too quickly, we knocked a 'dud' into action, fortunately at some distance, and suffered no more than a mud bath and dulled eardrums.

Screened in smoke, two men crept forward, carrying a Bangalore torpedo, its steel tube filled with high explosive. They placed this under the enemy's barbed wire and retired, leaving the short fuse alight, with a few seconds to run.

The subsequent explosion smashed a hole in the massed entanglement, but the platoon charging now—with bayonets and a yell of cheerful anticipation—did not wait on ceremony.

Those who could not make the gap, flung themselves face downwards on the wire, rifles extended in front of them and arms over their faces. Across this living bridge—one foot on a comrade's muscular back and a jump—the rest of the attackers hurled themselves on to the enemy post. Everyone—intent on making a good show, for it was the penultimate day of the course—fired or threw all the 'live stuff' he had.

The afternoon's battle began with a couple of scouts on reconnaissance. They were as good as African hunters. From a stony track

half-way up the mountain-side we saw only one gleam—as the sweat on an upturned face caught the sunlight. Otherwise they were invisible. Yet they reported to their platoon commander that an outlying huddle of houses was held in force.

A runner was dispatched to fetch the order group. They came at the double under fire, but taking all possible cover. Sheltered behind a ruin, the company commander explained the battle plan. Beside him we watched the disposition of our forces.

In the shallow valley Bren-gunners were taking advantage of the bracken. Their tracer bullets sent sheep stampeding up the hills. They also kept the 'enemy' inside the buildings 'captured'.

I could just see the bare arms and shoulder badges of these gunners. Their tin hats were covered with netting and tufts of grass, their faces smeared with earth, and their buttons purposely dulled.

But where barbed wire or stones or an explosive had torn their battle-dress, the clear mountain light exaggerated visibility. Flesh looked like white paper.

One attacking party came up the track on which we stood. Snipers flung themselves flat behind any convenient rock, and tried to cover a rush at the first house. The platoon commander scrambled over a gate, followed by men agile as monkeys. But the young instructor, still completely unruffled, was shouting, "You're under fire! You've lost half your men. The enemy have got your range, you can't hold that yard!"

Bombs exploded. Thunder-flashes represented rifle-fire. 'Shrapnel' ricocheted off tin hats. In good order, but with heavy losses, the attackers withdrew.

The next effort was more successful. Three different columns made a devious approach under cover of the guns which were moved up to pour in a 'withering fire' from both flanks of the German position.

The 'enemy' defending the battered houses and farm-buildings must have been having a hot time! The end was quick and exciting. Infantry with tommy-guns and grenades rushed the position under cover of a smoke-screen and of concentrated fire from the ruins where we stood.

The doors of the main yard were blown in by a 'sticky bomb', and a bayonet charge—every man yelling his head off—took the first house.

After that the 'enemy' fought from one building to another, but they were systematically 'knocked out', the attackers swarming over walls and roofs.

If there had been any Nazis holding that hamlet, not one would have come out alive. "After all, there's only one thing that'll win this war, and that's dead Germans!" said a lusty young sergeant, his battle-dress ripped over chest and thigh, his face bleeding, a satisfied grin from ear to ear.

CHAPTER XXXIX

England, 1942

Midnight Alarm. The A.T.S. on a Coastal Battery

ALL OVER BRITAIN—and off it too, upon all sorts of fragments of which I had previously been unconscious—I met and liked the A.T.S. Everywhere they were doing the jobs nearest to their hands with good temper and no fuss. Many of these jobs were extremely dull. Others were hard, cold, painful and conducive to a number of different aches.

One week I spent in the west country to see the work of the A.T.S. from start to finish. I had a young A.D.C. in the person of Second-Subaltern Begg, with delicious brown hair turned up under the brim of her cap like the best drakes' tails. She was very pretty, capable and determined. Hours meant nothing to her. Earnestly, she would pore over a time-table which seemed to me close-written as the waiting-list for London hotel rooms—in '43—or face-cream on the quota. "I see you have twenty minutes between your talk with the A.D.A.T.S. and tea at the Sergeants' Mess. I think we might just look in at the new club and you can say a few words."

"I haven't any more to say," I protested in desperation. But it had no effect. Whenever Second-Subaltern Begg, deliciously earnest and unruffled, looked at me expectantly, I always began to say "Impossible" before I knew what extra word—or words—she intended me to 'put in'. But I always did whatever she planned, however outrageous—in view of the gap between her years and mine—the length of the proceedings. I was lucky if I did not start at six for a distant county, spend an interesting day inspecting everything from potatoes or regulation pink corsets to recruits wearing the latter over their luncheon indulgence in the former, and be handed over in twilight to generals concerned with coastal defence. These were always intent on showing me—from dusk to dawn—what they had done *for* and *to* the A.T.S.

The universality of the women's auxiliary services impressed me above everything else. It was symbolic of the new world about which there is so much talk. From offices, factories and shop counters, from kitchens and children's nurseries they come. Mill girl and chorus girl, college graduate and duke's daughter, girls who have never owned a pair of silk stockings and girls who have never been without a mink coat—together they man the anti-aircraft batteries.

At an A.T.S. preliminary training centre, I watched the morning's 'intake'. About a hundred and fifty young women were waiting to be inoculated. Some of them were volunteers, leaving well-paid 'reserved' jobs because they wanted to 'give a first-line hand to the war'.

Others were conscripts—officially ‘army class’. Their age groups had been called up under the new universal service system which could put several million women into uniform.

One girl said, “I never had three sets of undies in my life before.” She had just realized that her army kit comprised eighteen different garments. Another said, “Do I have to wear all these at once, and summer coming on, too?” Her arms were full of neat shirts, ties, pyjamas, vests and pants. Four pairs of khaki stockings were draped over one shoulder.

The girl in front of her wore a suit I suspected of costing thirty pounds. She said, “I’ll miss horses. But if I can be a convoy driver I dare say that’ll make up for not hunting or racing.”

Every kind of trade and occupation was represented in that crowd. There were ‘bottle-winders’ and ‘cheese-winders’ from the Manchester mills who had spent their short grown-up lives—from sixteen onwards—winding yarn on to various-shaped spools on the cotton-loom. I asked a serious girl, “What was your job before the army got hold of you?” She said, “I was a white tipper.” This meant she had been in a pottery, marking the blue line round the edge of white enamel basins and jugs.

In the A.T.S. they can choose between twenty-six different occupations. These range from an anti-aircraft battery, inland or on the coast, signalling and decoding, a complicated teleprinter or telephone switch-board with its different coloured priority numbers, convoy driving, technical workshops and the hard training of a fitter capable of dealing with heavy machinery, to cooks, typists, accountants and clerks expert in discharges, army ‘leave’ and pay sheets.

Four weeks’ preliminary training makes girls straight from school, home, office, shop and factory war-minded. They are taught the history of the fighting forces, first-aid and gas lore. They are drilled physically and mentally till their backs are straight and their wits as mobile as their feet. The officers are specially chosen for sense, personality, tolerance and understanding. All these are necessary, and humour as well.

“Which would you rather take out—a girl in khaki or a civilian?” I asked a good-looking army driver. “There ain’t any question about that,” said the tall youth. “A girl in uniform every time. I am not so keen on this glamour business. I like a girl with sense who can understand a man’s job.”

Every training centre is expected to send half its output to anti-aircraft batteries, but this is volunteer work. The girls are warned they must be prepared to be out in all weathers, to be on their feet if necessary for twenty-four hours, to be stationed in the loneliest places—on windswept hills or along a desolate coast—and to be bombed or shelled with the gun crews, in the front line.

Many girls volunteer every month. Selection is stern, “Have you

good eyesight and strong feet?" "Sure you've never had any trouble with your insteps?" "Do you mind being alone?" "You're not frightened of the dark, are you?"

I heard grave young officers who had done their service in the ranks putting such questions to girls. "If you don't like loneliness, if you can't stand rain and snow and darkness, if you want bright lights and company, don't take on this job," warned the young, serious voices of those who had already won the stars on their shoulder-straps.

On a dull, grey evening with rain pending I was taken far into the western hills to see an ack-ack battery in 'action'. The Brigadier was proud of his mixed complement, four hundred strong. They held two positions in the mighty network defending an important coastal area. There were 156 men and 226 women, but at first sight it was difficult to tell them apart. For they were all soldiers. They had been recruited for 'the real thing'.

They had been in action—three and a half hours of battle with enemy bombers. They were tough and out for a kill. "I've got 1,600 ack-ack girls in my area," explained the Brigadier. "They do twenty-four-hour duty, 2 p.m. to 2 p.m., and their jobs include everything except actually firing the guns."

The country lane turned sharply into a field. The guard at the gate—three girls with a corporal of their own sex—saluted smartly. A platoon in battle-dress were drilling. They also were girls.

Up to the canteen we went, between neat vegetable beds and wooden huts which girl carpenters and masons had helped to build. We passed field cooks preparing the battery supper in the open air. They had constructed their own oven of bricks and cement. It was functioning as well as any regulation field-kitchen forged in an army smithy. Close by, a hefty lot of girls were 'doing P.T.'—physical training. The instructor evidently thought his company was made of rubber and flexible whalebone. The girls looked gloriously healthy and fit for everything.

In the canteen, an old campaigner, tough as they are made, sold me cigarettes. He had all the usual masculine merchandise, with hair-nets and face-powder as well. I was looking at his admirable selection of lipsticks—within a hundred yards of the mammoth anti-aircraft battery, and a large number of miles from anywhere else—when the alarm sounded.

Presumably a detector—infallible ear of modern warfare—had picked up the sound of enemy planes. Within the same second the hill was on its feet. From every side men and girls were running to their different posts. The P.T. squad in bloomers and vests were legging it like kangaroos! "Three minutes is the limit we give them," said the O.C. "If it's a midnight alarm, they come out with greatcoats over their pyjamas." Hurrying up to the command post—in twilight now—we found the gun crews already in position. These were men,

but in the next pit, a few yards away, steel-hatted girls were working the enormous instruments which discover range, speed, direction and height of enemy planes.

In the control room underground, twenty-five girls under the 'T.C.O.' (technical control officer—in this case a woman) were plotting the position of the invading aircraft.

This instrument was in a heavily sand-bagged pit of its own, above the camouflaged control room. It was worked by a crew of six girls with a woman officer. An emergency crew and various 'spares' were in reserve. If a girl were hit by a bomb splinter, wounded or killed, another would take her place at once.

As we arrived, breathless, the gun position officer's assistant was shouting into a field telephone, giving a bearing to the gun-pits. A solitary plane was visible way off to the west. Assured and unhurried, a couple of girls at the height-finder—something like a giant telescope—were ascertaining altitude and passing it on to the predictor group where six pairs of neat, quick fingers, flawlessly accurate, were ready for the complicated dials. The 'G.P.O.' (gun position officer) was using a pair of binoculars.

"What type is it?" he asked the girl private at the 'telescope'. She straightened from the eye-hole and answered at once. It was one of our own patrols. But far beyond human sight an enemy approached.

Swift, sharp orders. The barrels of the big guns swung up. "No. 1 gun ready, sir." "No. 2 gun ready . . ." Still and stiff with excitement, the battery waited the order to fire. There was an irresistible suggestion of power in that welded group of men and women with one purpose and one spirit. And the great guns soared indomitable, challenging the sky.

The ghostly, grey moth that was one of our own fighters disappeared. We went down into the control room and watched. Girls were automatically plotting position and course, while others, with telephones at their ears, maintained touch with numerous gun positions in that particular defence area.

We waited. But that night there was no action. The coast towns of England slept in peace. Freighters dropped anchor in our rivers after 5,000-mile voyages overseas. Convoys of battle material, driven by A.T.S. girls, sped through the night to the various supply depôts. All this under the shadow of ack-ack batteries.

I talked with the crew when the 'alarm' ended. The men averaged twenty-six years in age, the girls nineteen. The Brigadier told me, "The men are apt to get fidgety between planes, on action stations, but the girls are astoundingly calm. They bring up a bit of knitting, and get down to it when they've a few minutes off the instruments. It's amazing the difference they make on a gun position. The men seem to be able to do without swearing when there are girls about. Off the site we make no difference between lads and girls. They're tremen-

dously good comrades. They eat together and I believe the girls do some of the men's mending. In return they get taught all the trades our gunners know. After the war we'll probably have women steeplejacks and telephone linemen."

CHAPTER XL

Great Britain, 1942 and 1943

'Are You Part of the Show?' Lectures for the Air Ministry and the War Office

ONE DAY LADY TORRES, most capable of porcelain shepherdesses, told me I must come and talk to the young airmen, for whom she had organized a club—about the Middle East, I think. At that time there was only one front which mattered. It stretched—in May, 1942—from the Caucasus to the Libyan Desert. Von Bock and Rommel were victorious at either end of this immense battle-line. Their objective was the same. From north and south they hoped to drive towards the circle, roughly six hundred miles in diameter, representing the oil of Caucasia, Iraq and Persia. All these lands I knew.

Beyond the limestone dome of Mazandaran and Kuzistan lay the British supply roads to Russia. By the Persian railway three thousand tons of war material travelled north each day to the Ninth Army and to Marshal Timoshenko, then retreating towards the Volga. Farther east were the Japanese—advancing. An American economist had just announced that junction between the Swastika and the Rising Sun in the East "would add twenty years to the war". It could then no longer be measured in terms of military effort. It would become a cosmic evolution in which several generations might be concerned.

With my back to the canteen bar, with cups and saucers rattling and hushed voices asking for 'Gold Flake' or 'Capstans', I spoke about the Bridge of Asia—forty-eight hours hard going between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf—which has held up every invader in turn, from Pompey to the first Napoleon.

After that evening the Air Ministry took charge of me. For months I travelled from the Firth of Forth to Land's End in Cornwall, speaking about the Middle Eastern fronts or about Canada, where hosts of young airmen were training.

I remember a huge concourse in Manchester. There must have been several thousand lads in grey-blue. They were sailing in a matter of hours. Keen, serious, intent they listened. They wanted to know what kind of country they were going to, how they would be received, what differences they would find, and what mistakes they would be

likely to make. Lots of these boys asked, "What ought we *not* to do?"

When I left the theatre, the ranks remained for a short service. "We don't know what they'll meet on the Atlantic. This is the last—and the best—we can do for them over here," said an officer.

It was not always to packed thousands that I spoke. On a Yorkshire aerodrome—where sudden need had put every available crew into the skies—the audience consisted of two sergeants and a black cat. A few senior officers and a W.A.A.F. joined us and we had an interesting discussion. It resolved itself into the old tangle—do results justify the methods used to attain them? But it began with whether the ordinary Russian artisan or peasant was fighting for his politics or the soil which bred him.

I found Russia the most difficult of all platform subjects. For everyone had prickly, preconceived ideas, coloured according to their own politics. Such a state of mind—to me—will always be incomprehensible. As a traveller, I cannot understand how any one country or one system can be neatly labelled 'good' or 'bad'. It must consist of infinite degrees of both. Yet intolerant Tories and equally superficial Communists want to ticket a sixth of the total earth surface, containing a tenth of the human population, with the same description. How can fifty-seven different races, speaking as many different languages, in all the stages of evolution—from the nomad of the Kirghiz steppes or the fishermen of the squalid Volga hovels to the engineers who built the Dnieper dam or the scientists who invented the latest anti-tuberculosis serum in Samarkand—be levelled into the same category of perfection, or the reverse?

Soviet Russia to me is the greatest human experiment the world has known. It was conceived by men and women with courage and unselfishness and the madness which comes from too much misery. It necessitated the sacrifice of countless victims. It was built step by step out of such suffering as America and England have never known. It had in it—as is the case with all vast, evolutionary systems—the diabolical as well as the divine. For the original G.P.U. inherited from the Czars was the model of the Gestapo. Bolshevism used force as its chief tool, but it was—in spite of its anti-God newspaper—a spiritual as much as a social and an industrial movement. It could not possibly have endured and turned destruction into creation had it not developed in the hearts as well as the heads of the workers. But the goal has not yet been reached. How could so vast a change in mind as well as material be achieved in twenty struggling years, with a hundred and eighty millions to be educated and trained, with half a hemisphere hitherto mainly agricultural to be industrialized, with the development natural to centuries to be expedited and compressed into the scope of one generation?

Soviet Russia, in twenty years, has done more than any other land

I know, but she could not—humanly or inhumanly—have done what unthinking foreign Communists expect of her. She is still as some mighty canvas stretched upon a frame, with the design not yet complete. To the work already done, the war will add new threads which may reshape the whole pattern. For Russia, I think, the war—in spite of its tragedies and its horror—must, in the end, be wholly good. It will bring the new Russians into the comity of peoples, from whom they have been isolated during the ruthless years of growth and experiment. What they have achieved is now established and acknowledged. It must influence the world. It must help in the remodelling of Europe. The shape of things to come will be largely affected by the Soviet social experiment—as by the heroism with which Russia followed the example of China and Britain, resisting Axis aggression with everything in their power. But the Soviet Union is in need of new ideas. Her mental and physical isolation was as bad for her own people as intolerance in any form is for ours.

So I argued with enthusiasts in Air Force blue whenever—much against my will—I was induced to speak about Russia. For the most part, my lectures were concerned with North Africa and the Middle East, or the Empire wherein I had travelled—on and off the map—throughout my grown-up life. But questions always ran riot. Army Co-operation squadrons wanted to know about that misnamed 'second front'. I explained we had already fought or were then fighting on six—in Persia, Syria, Greece, in Burma, Madagascar and Abyssinia, where we were outnumbered literally one to ten, in North Africa and on the coasts of France, not to mention some hundred thousand sea miles kept open by the navy and the merchant service.

Bomber squadrons insisted on asking whether the weight of metal they poured unceasingly on Germany could of itself win the war. This was a very prickly subject. I begged that the question should be barred, in view of Bomber Command's feelings as well as its superlative services. But no audience could resist the query in some fashion or another, "Could bombing alone win the war?"

I thought of London, bombed night after night for eight months from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. She was comparatively unarmed, yet she carried on as a matter of course and remained, fundamentally, unhurt. I could not believe the vast mass of German-controlled central Europe would be conquered by anything except combined operations, long sustained, on the part of all three fighting forces backed by the whole-hearted co-operation of civilian populations. This I explained with great care. Bombing, I thought, would play an ever-increasing part—but not the only one. The young men in grey-blue were disappointed. They were prepared to win the war—in a few months—entirely on their own.

To all branches of the R.A.F. I spoke—to Fighter, Reconnaissance, Intruder and Interceptor squadrons, to recruits and W.A.A.F.s and

groundsmen, to Coastal Defence units right out at the tip of our islands, and to patrolling units which are the lifeboat service of the air over the North Sea and the Channels, directing or themselves effecting sensational sea rescues.

Sometimes Air Marshals were my chairmen and sometimes pilot officers. Once an enthusiastic young airman announced that I was famous for my travels in Thibet. Diffidently I explained that—with the exception of New Zealand—it was the only country which I had never seen. Another endangered my heart by saying that I particularly belonged to the R.A.F. because, aged seventeen, I had served with a 'flying ambulance' in the last year of the last war. But—alas!—it was not a plane. It was a huge 60 h.p. Mercédès, without self-starter or windscreen, belonging to the Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires.

With prodigious hospitality, the R.A.F. entertained me to at least four meals a day. Nearly always I sat next to thin young men, rather subdued and shadowed, I thought, but sometimes just the contrary, with red hair and the characteristics of fighting Irish terriers. Most of them wore striped ribbons on their tunics. The only thing which moved them to emotion or expression was a query concerning these. Then they became startlingly eloquent in order to prove they had done nothing at all. 'The ribbon was a mistake.' 'They had not noticed it.' 'They should not have received it.'

Equal embarrassment was caused by my efforts to rescue my arrival from the pit of embarrassed silence into which it always fell after such opening sentences as, "Will you have a drink?" "Very good of you to come," and after a pause, "Sure you won't have a short one?" For one must not mention anything within eye-range camouflaged on land, or obvious in the air.

I became so nervous and so involved—with diffidence and discretion—that I dared not ask the kind of jam on the tea-table or the hour of my departure for the next speech! After some months with the R.A.F. I would not have asked the names of seeds sown in their vegetable plots, or if there was any thread in the Quartermaster's stores to mend the last hole in my Gruyère cheese stockings. With enormous respect I left them—and was immediately adopted by the War Office.

Lecturing to the Army was quite different. We were all on the same plane. The young airmen who had listened to me earnestly and fed me persistently and as speechlessly as possible, belonged to a different element. Into it I had ventured, flying a borrowed plane in South America and Rajputana, or sitting day after day detached and relaxed above Brazilian forests, Burman or Persian hills, deserts in Arabia or Noah's Ark bush full of animals in East Africa—but I knew nothing about it. It did not belong to me, nor I to it. The men who wear wings have a different point of view. I do not know exactly what it is, but it sets them apart. Hillary in *The Last Enemy* with whom he came to grips and I hope—consciously—defeated over the North

Sea, and 'Bill' Simpson in *One of Our Pilots is Safe* have explained it—a little—perhaps more than they intended. But the fighting men of the air share something which they cannot and will not communicate to anybody else. They are at ease and content with each other. Even the women they love and marry are rarely given the privileges of ordinary wives. They have to do without the usual exactions of familiarity. Like the rest of us they must often

“Lie in the dark and listen—

Theirs is a world that you will never know”.¹

The Army I adored—all of it! Never have I worked so hard or moved so persistently in all my life. Through 1942 and most of '43 I averaged two lectures a day, and they were generally followed by questions and discussion. They were also far apart—often in places difficult to reach.

In South Wales I spoke to men who had gone from the pits into the local regiments and still thought in terms of coal, capitalism and labour, government responsibility and so on. We had terrific arguments seated on boxes—or if it were a camp—on logs. 'Security' was the last thing I wanted when I began life and—still—there seem to me many things much more important. But I was interested by the insistent demands for security at any price, which is the keynote of socialism to-day. Wages and hours, living conditions and travel, effort and success must all be regulated, an official balance adjusted between how much you work and how much you achieve. The State owes this to you, but there is less interest in what you owe to your own country. Yet this is the prime concern of Russia, Germany and Japan. Very puzzling I found it, and wished I were twenty to-day! Then, I suppose, I should understand better why certainty served on a platter, mass-produced and garnished with red tape, should be so much more attractive than adventure and the right to struggle—to fail, to learn for yourself, to struggle again and win maybe, or to fall—on your own sword.

I lectured for a week two or three times a day to gunners marooned on curious rocks and unsuspected islets or spurs of land round the Firth of Forth. They were as isolated as if they had been Laplanders. Sometimes it took the oddest hours to get to them. One unit used to do two miles running round and round its post before breakfast with a subsequent plunge into the river. It was—as usual—grey and cold. I shivered as I thought of it. When I left, the grim young officer wrung my hand and said, “Good luck. I wish my men had your guts——” For once speech deserted me. But in future when I feel most depressed, unsuccessful and useless—in fact, a general muddle, indigo blue—I shall remember with gratitude that outrageous but comforting compliment.

¹ Noel Coward.

In Edinburgh I stayed with General Sir Algernon Thorne, just before Government House became 'a monastery' as a result of the Commander-in-Chief's decision that wives must not be with 'operational' husbands. Under the charm of Lady Thorne my newly acquired solemnity peeled like an ill-fitting suit of overalls. We talked of 'before the war'. Then several people asked me what changes I had noticed when I came back from Canada. I said, "Well, we are very like Russia in peace-time."

Expostulations followed. "How do you mean?" asked Lady Thorne. I tried to explain. Work is as much a habit of mind in England now as it has been for twenty years in the Soviet Union. In our shops there is less and less to buy. More coupons are needed to procure what little there is. Food is reduced to the least common denominator—starch. Bread, potatoes and 'vegs', boiled for lunch. Potatoes, bread and 'vegs'—parboiled—for supper. Queues for the weekly scrap of meat, queues for drugs and cosmetics and newspapers, for rations, for 'remnants'—sold by weight instead of yards—queues for buses and railway tickets, for most things you wear and use, and for everything you at all enjoy. Expressions, also, are beginning to be Russian. Smiles are rare. People are grim, determined, earnest, a trifle strained—listening to more and more instructions—trying to 'do better than last year' when last year they did all they could. "We are lean," I said, warming to my subject, "if we were accustomed to milk and butter. We are inelegantly swollen if our stomachs do not approve of starch. We are serious, because we are always trying to get somewhere, or do without something. Our feet are flat, our eyes not so good as they were before we use them for such excess of purposes, our backbones are fluid and our spirits ramrods. All this is decidedly Russian."

While they laughed at my description, I remembered shock workers in the Soviet Union pledged to increase production at the expense of their own nerves, with just the Londoners' early morning expression: "I don't like this, but nobody can stop me doing it." I thought if anybody wanted to show what Russian workers endured as a matter of course, it would only be necessary to take a film of the boots which wait for transport night and morning or tramp to their factories—indomitably—through the snow and mud.

Our feet are beginning to look the same. I used to mount army platforms with my soles flapping. Draughts blew cheerfully round my bare legs. But my hats were still excellent jokes—uncoupons. The soldiers enjoyed them enormously. Those hats always carried me safely over the first chill sentences till the audiences—fearing a 'flop' or a 'fatigue'—realized they were going to get something new said loud and clear—by someone who had been there! That was my great advantage—in addition to the hats. I had always 'been there'.

CHAPTER XLI

1943

I Would Like to Have Been More Useful

AS THE PATTERN OF STRATEGY became clearer and it was inevitable that the Mediterranean would be of primal importance, I lectured only about North Africa. Of course I had no idea where or when the first landing would be made, but—in common with the men to whom I spoke and who used to ask ‘Are you part of the show?’—I realized it must be in that part of the world. So with enormous maps hung on the wall, or drawn optimistically on a blackboard, I begged the then component parts of the First Army to ‘let their imagination rip’.

They were an amazing lot of men. I have never seen harder. The colonel of a regiment which fought an impossible action in Tunisia and got away with it, introduced me: “Northampton! We know we shall soon be off. Many of us will not come back——” Spurred by such plain speaking, I told what Africa *must* mean to Hitler and *could* mean to us.

Near Perth, I spoke to the Guards who twice took the hills at Medjez el Bab. One battalion which gave me dinner in their mess had twenty-seven casualties out of its thirty officers. In a corner of north-east England, I met the famous Fifty-first. They told me of Dunkirk and what they had lost in France. I told them of the back door into Europe by way of Africa. Scottish C.O.s lent me their crooks as pointers. A month later they took them into battle.

At Richmond in Yorkshire, a surprised sergeant, when he read the first news from Casablanca and Oran, said to the Education Officer, “Well, I don’t know as Hitler’s so much of a prophet. But”—*crescendo*, “what about *our* Miss Forbes?”

Before leaving the Army—most of it now in action and in Europe—I spoke to gunners strung along the English Channel. Often they lived in concrete surrounded by sea, off the land altogether. In such strange places, shaped like tortoise-shells, with thirty or forty gunners crowded round my feet, I talked about the African ways into Europe. Occasionally, after a lecture, the officers took me ‘round the town’. In Dover, on the blackest night I remember, with a German gun firing at regular intervals from somewhere in France, a young C.O. who had been an actor took me to dine in a cellar—exiguously—on imitation sole. Then we walked through the flash-lit darkness in search of diversion. There was none to be found. In a grim, stained upper room, with the plush peeling, we found bombardiers drinking tea and

cocoa with their girls. Disconcerted, but anxious to talk—about ourselves—we indulged in the same discomforting beverages. At ten o'clock a large woman, garishly coloured, said it was closing time. We walked back to my hotel, which prided itself on being the nearest inhabited building to enemy territory. The Channel was having a war of its own. For a convoy, taking advantage of cloud, was trying to slip through the straits. German planes and guns had discovered its whereabouts. Our own were providing cover—and a variety of diversion. Recognition lights dropped into the sky. Flares drifted down like carnival umbrellas. It was gay—and terrible. "That's torn it," said my companion, and departed rapidly.

So it went on. By the autumn of 1942 I was speaking in the Lancashire boroughs for the Economic League and its Youth Movement. After civic receptions at the Town Halls, there were solemn processions, led by Mayors and Councillors, to one platform after another. There were also fish-and-chip meals with Lancashire workers.

I remember a tea-party at Wigan. It was a solid and satisfying meal, all fried in spite of rationed fats. The tea was rich and strong; so was the talk. Opposite me sat a tall, slight woman beautifully shaped. To this day I remember her hat. It was yellow, tip-tilted and so gay. She wore large pearl beads in her ears. Her profile was cool and clear like Botticelli's very young Madonnas. But she was not young. I have never seen a more arresting face. In the warm Lancashire speech, she told me of her life in the cotton mills. She had worked there as a girl, married, borne children and gone back to the looms 'for the duration', in answer to a war-time appeal. She described her hurried housework before she left home in the dark, the chill and damp of city streets, the mill—strong-smelling, alive and lusty with noise. The foreman used to turn off the lights to save rationed electricity while the girls ate the breakfast they had brought with them. It might be the wholesome, dark-coloured war-time bread with sausages made of soya beans and flour, seasoned perhaps with horsemeat. There was not much other to spare. They ate at their looms. They spoke in sign language above the ceaseless clatter. They worked on—during the war winters—till it was dark again. Then they poured out into the greasy streets, hugging themselves into their worn coats. They earned good wages, but they had no more clothes coupons than the rest of us. Sixty a year to begin with—then forty. Certainly not enough to cover any woman inside and out. It was a choice between "sleeping raw" in unheated rooms with an iced razor-blade of wind finding every flaw in war-worn houses, or going without underclothes. The year's coupons permitted just one suit for summer and another for winter, but nothing else. By 1942 and 1943, squirrel cupboards were empty, darns and patches noticeable as a tartan on Fifth Avenue. The evening shopping was done as quickly as the long queues allowed. In the mill towns, housewives knew just what they wanted. Fish and

chips were easy to cook. But often there were notices scrawled across the windows, "No fish to-day". Still more often there was not even standing room in the crowded buses. The women walked home, in as much of a crowd as possible. They cooked the evening meal. Then they got down to their "real housework".

If I remember rightly what the Madonna in the yellow hat told me, Monday night was for washing, Tuesday was for ironing, Wednesday for mending, Thursday the instalment-men came for the weekly payments on clothes, furniture, kitchen implements, bicycles and radios. Like America, Lancashire lived and thrived on the hire-purchase system. On Thursday nights the housewives had their purses ready. Their accounts were done on well-thumbed scraps of paper. They knew where they were to the last penny. Friday they shopped—on a larger scale—for the week-end and Sunday dinner. They did their special cleaning and that was thorough. Saturday nights they went to the movies with their men. Sunday they 'lay in' a bit, visited their families, went to church and—after high tea—got ready for Monday's work.

It seemed to me a grim life. It was whole-heartedly gallant. Watching it from 1942 into 1943, with, on occasions, the added strain of bombs and clearing up litter—bodies and glass, bricks and timber, blood, oil, grease, broken flesh, discoloured water, in smell of burning, smell of dust and wintry earth—I learned to respect England as I had never imagined possible. I had seen so little of her between the two wars, other countries I knew far better. England I misunderstood. For I heard little but her grumbling and wrangling over parish pump politics. I saw little but her unbecoming blinkers. Age looked backwards and youth inwards. *Sinn Fein*—'for myself alone'—was symbolic of Britain in the last decades while Scandinavia developed her social conscience, Russia experimented in human expression, Italy had her 'Dopo Lavoro', America her Tennessee development, Germany her 'Strength Through Joy', and even Bulgaria her State labour contributions. How far behind the rest of the world we seemed until Dunkirk and Mr. Churchill wrought a Shakespearian sea-change—"into something rich and strange". That change I saw from Lancashire to Newcastle and back again to the Welsh pits, the Cornish mines and the war-plants camouflaged all over the English country. But always that fish-and-chips tea in Wigan will remain in my mind for its warmth of speech and understanding, for the grand tiredness of the women—as if they had laboured in the first days of Genesis and prevailed.

So much has been written about war England, but lit by the lime-light—of London burning, of the Thames sheeted with oil and aflame, of Hull, and Exeter and Coventry laid waste or of the ports in 'Hell's Corner' hourly bombarded. But that is not everyday England as we knew her best in the long years between Dunkirk and the invasion of Italy. It seems to me that a Russian girl with

whom I talked—in 1933 I think—on the Neva quays in Leningrad, expressed most exactly the essence of England ten years later. It might have been a prophecy instead of a description of her own feelings in her own land. She looked, that frozen afternoon in early spring, much as my young countrywomen looked in the last winters of their undaunted struggle against the circumstances of their war lives as well as enemy offensives. Her hands were reddened with cold. Her boots were better than ours by 1943. Her coat was worn and not very thick. So were ours—after three years of coupons. I doubted if she had enough underclothing. But her spirit blazed. I do not know if she was happy, but she was certainly efficient. She had a purpose, comparable with ours after Dunkirk. To it she was welded by an infinity of small but persistent sacrifices. It was the same in England, while year in, year out, we prepared for those mighty invasions—of North Africa, Italy and France. “I dare say I’ve never really had quite enough to eat. If I stop to think, I’d probably realize I’ve never had quite enough of anything. I suppose I am always either a bit hungry or cold or tired. But what *does* it matter? How can it matter at all? The ‘*plan*’ goes on. We are working for the Future.” The Russian clenched her hands and thrust them into the pockets of her coat. Her face was strong and determined, her eyes alight.

She was giving all she had for a definite purpose—a mighty purpose in which she believed. She said, “Can’t you understand? We are creating the model for a new civilization. Isn’t that enough?”

Consciously, or the reverse, most of us in England felt this same faith. It was exceedingly uncomfortable at times, but it sufficed.

Its substance was the very antithesis of Hitler’s sombre assertion, “We have come to the end of that period in history when personal happiness counted. It is no longer of any importance. We may have to say that it cannot exist. . . .” But it was and is because England believed in personal happiness—as a right and a certainty—that she put up with the innumerable difficulties, discomforts and deprivations, each represented by some scrap of paper, which are incomparably more difficult to endure than nights of bombing. “Infinity of boredom, punctuated by moments of intense fear,” was somebody’s description of trench warfare in 1917. Twenty-five years later, fear was at times an agreeable relief from the infinity of effort needed for the least common denominator of ordinary everyday living! But it did not matter. How could it matter? As the Russian girl—a worker in a municipal office—protested on the banks of the Neva, the prison of SS. Peter and Paul in sight, “We are working for the future.”

When, years hence, English women look back upon the war at home, I wonder if it is the bombing they will most remember. I think not. There was a certain splendour about the nights of terror and of labour. Fear, of course, was there, but it was an undercurrent to endeavour.

People worked so hard, they had little time to think. They were united, as they had probably never been before in a purpose so tremendous that—for the moment, in noise and intense cold, in wet and mud, limelited by recognition signals, flash of guns firing, searchlight cones and parachute flares—they were carried along as it were on a flood. Next day they were at lowest ebb, aching with exhaustion and probably cross, but still conscious of stimulus. I remember a night in Birmingham. It was the summer of 1942. I was speaking for the War Office at camps and barracks in the neighbourhood. I had arrived late and asked for a room at the back of the hotel. "I want to be quiet," I said, and thought, "I must sleep to-night." Insomnia has always been my worst enemy. Amiably the clerk changed my reservation from a room looking across the street on to a small garden and a church to one soundless in the well of the big building. I went to bed with wax in my ears. The government used to issue it free of charge in the London blitz. I felt myself sinking into sleep as if it were a heap of down quilts. Cumulus clouds could have been no softer. Then the noise began. Birmingham, I think, had not had a raid for some time, and travelling round the country, each night in a different village, speaking in camouflaged hutments, in tents deep in the woods, or on aerodromes masquerading as farm-lands, I had forgotten the blitz. But that night German planes were in force. They droned round and round at leisure. Once again there was the feeling of a monstrous hive, of bees, heavy-laden, bumbling down to the window-sills. I switched on the light. The room was large and very dreary. Nothing had been done to it for years. The paint was cracked and dirty, the wallpaper peeling. Hotels in industrial Britain are *not* the best expression of our island talent. This one was peculiarly drab. Soon the room—coloured like a rotting plum—shook with the peculiar uncertainty of pudding insufficiently jellied. Noise was the only solid factor. The window split as high explosive poured out of the sky. I left the large, comfortable bed and held a sponge full of cold water to the back of my neck. Then I did physical exercises on the floor. There was an overwhelming thump and a slow, crumbling subsidence. I thought the front of the hotel had gone. But the bomb had just missed. It fell across the narrow street against the church wall. The front room in which I should have slept became a rubbish heap.

Methodically I continued my exercises. They were of the most vigorous kind. Then a loud-speaker, which had been burbling directions about the nearest shelter, asked for volunteers. It took me three minutes to dress. The ache in the back of my neck and the fear in my stomach—that is where it always is, for fear is a commonplace, inelegant emotion!—disappeared. Running downstairs, I ceased to feel bruised and stupefied. My wits returned. With dozens of other people, I worked with any tool handy. We dug and dragged and lifted. We ceased feeling cold or uncertain. We sweated as brick

dust coated our faces. We felt strong and dirty, battered and hurried, important and immensely companionable. At least, that is what I felt—and something of a nurse and a housemaid too. I expect we were very inefficient, but—in support of the A.R.P. and the regular municipal services—we held up beams and burrowed in débris. We lifted and clambered and searched. We helped pull out live bodies and dead ones. We picked up pieces of bodies, and that was the worst. But nothing, to me, was intimately dreadful. The pattern was too vast. It was a Wagnerian night, heaven in tumult, the skies in blazing dissolution. It was, in its way, as magnificent as it was horrible.

Next day I spoke in an army hut in the middle of Lord Ailsford's park. It was very peaceful. There were twisted, ancient trees, bracken and splotted cows. In front of me were some of the faces I had seen, streaked with dirt, in the mad lighting of the raid. They looked stretched and tired. Some of the men could hardly keep their lids up. But they listened. I felt we were all in the job together. But it was as if they made me a gift of the feeling. For I would be out of it that night—in another town, perhaps sleeping quietly. They would be doing the same thing all over again. For the Germans were thorough. They always came back.

There must have been many nights in variations of the same theme—in Coventry, Bristol, Hull, in Plymouth and Exeter. One month or another, I spoke in all these towns, veterans of the air-war. But it is not such occasions of fear, relief and inspiration, of sudden blinding beauty and odd comfort with hot coffee in the dawn, standing among broken walls or sitting on pitiful heaps—that I remember as the war in England. It is Monday mornings early going out into the street carrying a suitcase, always too heavy in spite of careful packing. It is shivering on a cold, wet street, waiting for a bus. Then a flash of red or yellowish green as the overcrowded vehicle lumbered past. No hope. A mass of people wedged inside. Would I miss the train? Hurried consultation among the queue. Already backs were aching and feet stained. Most of us by 1943 had cardboard in our shoes. Was there any hope of a taxi? Shoulders shrugged. Perhaps we could get a lift? Sometimes a business car stopped and we piled in, anxious about the time lost. Sometimes a bus stopped. Standing-room only. How I hated that beginning-of-the-week struggle across London. The gaping holes in Oxford Street depressed me. So did hanging on to a strap after a starch breakfast, with holes in my soles and the knowledge that I wouldn't get a seat in the train. A hurried rush across the station, fog, damp and chill, or an endless wait in the queue before the ticket window—eternity in slow motion—and then standing for hours in a jerking, bouncing corridor as the train plodded north. That was 1943 with transport pared to the bone. There was little food at the stations, none on the trains. We shared our currantless 'buns', our

nameless paste sandwiches. There was one kind of anonymous pink slab, sticky as soap yet strangely hairy inside, sold at railway buffets which few travellers could stomach. We bought it because there was nothing else. We bit into it with determination. Grease and grit made us retch. Always we looked at each other—strangers, in uniform or worn tweeds, bound for 'directed' jobs, in effect conscripted—and after grimaces, somebody always laughed. That made things better. But I do not remember much laughter in those years when every human being, between the ages of eighteen and fifty, if they were women, ten years older if they were men, was working nearer ten hours than eight (generally) six days a week, and firewatching one night out of three. England, as I saw it then, was determined and capable. She was also very tired.

I still remember my first sight of an American aerodrome and the startled impression of vigour. It was gay, untroubled, strangely untouched vigour. I saw enormous machines, the mastodons and dinosaurs of our generation, tearing up the earth and spewing a road behind them as if it were out of their maw. I saw concrete runways spinning and dripping out of the insides of other machines. It was a mechanical Genesis. Enormous young men—in wonderful, new clothes, so it seemed to me—effectively directed operations. They were cool and untiring. I admired their gloves. They were still entirely outside the war and, because of this, enormously refreshing. They were earnest, homesick, troubled sometimes about their own or their country's purpose, warmly hospitable, splendidly talkative. They wanted to be sure of a mission, to be sure they were right—in the war and about it—and in their hearts, they wanted so much to be home again. They had little books, already well thumbed and studied, telling them how to behave in the 'differentness' of England. They tried so hard and they found us difficult as well as different. So they tried harder, for they were generous in their youth and courage. If I subsided back-boneless on a station platform and on that abhorrent suitcase which got heavier each hour till homebound on Saturday night, it was always an American who said, gruff with shyness, "Carry your grip, lady?" How many stalwart American arms bore that international piece of luggage through crowds that in years of peace I would never have attempted to pierce, forced it and me up the steps of solidly packed coaches, lifted it into racks or pushed it out of windows already sliding away!

These are the things I remember most clearly about the war at home.

In the spring of 1943 we had a top-floor flat in London. My husband was Military Assistant to Britain's Commander-in-Chief, Sir Bernard Paget, so we could spend most Sundays together, just under the sky it seemed, and I used to cook dinner. That I considered a definite achievement. For I have no domestic talent. Marketing took me hours. All down the King's Road, shopping went on late into Saturday

night. Queues of housewives, long as a comet's tail, but far more stationary, spent the whole of the week's allowance in "points" for their ounces of meat, fat, sugar and tea. Sometimes, one in every dozen women got an egg. There were plenty of green vegetables, bread and potatoes. Only one Saturday did the dusky brown loaves give out. There was dismay, but no disorder.

Until that wintry spring, I never knew how heavy food weighed—especially potatoes. Lopsided, like all the women, to ease first one hip then the other, I stood, back curved and stomach thrust out, a straw shopping-bag in each hand, purse crammed under one arm, ration-book conveniently between one's teeth. No extra fingers were available. Flat-footed like all the rest, I clumped home, pausing at intervals to pick up the things which invariably spilled out of the over-stuffed bags. If one broke, there was a hunt in the gutter. Strangers helped. They were always elderly, duchess or charwoman, one never knew. But occasionally a brooch, half-hidden under an old coat, or a sable skin incongruous above a four-year-old dress suggested the spacious living which had played its part in history. There was little of it left. The great houses were barracks and hospitals. The smaller—those manors which were the veins of English country life, so much they contributed to the well-being of their neighbourhood—were decaying without fuel or service.

London was a hive of flats, section after section, occupied only at night. The streets were so quiet in the working hours, one could imagine grass growing. The shops were a repetition of 'Sorry, we are out of it', 'We've had none in stock since I don't know when', and 'We are not expecting any more'. It is astonishing how many of the necessities of life are not necessary at all. One week I found myself without comb, scissors, girdle, stockings, shoe-soles, mirror, press-studs, needle or hook and eye. But life did not notice. It went on just the same.

Eating, however, continued to be necessary. At midday the new popular restaurants solved the problem. Foreign missions and rich refugees, charming Americans with heavenly clothes, a few distinguished over-sixties, occasional youth on its day off—gay, shabby, brilliant lipstick, no hat—lunched at Claridge's, earlier and earlier to be sure the food would hold out. But workers—and that was everybody with a sufficiency of able limbs or wits—made straight for a one and sixpenny meal, soup, stew and pudding, heavy but filling, served likely as not in a pre-war ballroom. The decorations may still have been supercilious, the service was the reverse.

Sundays meant eating at home. And that was my recurrent defeat. It took me hours to prepare a meal. When it and I were equally chaotic, Arthur—incomparably elegant, I thought—used to come into the pocket handkerchief size kitchen. Anxious to be helpful, but unable to conceal his distaste, he would say, "Don't you think you'd

get on quicker if you cleaned up as you went along?" "I have," I would answer, but over my eyes, arms blistered, for I always basted myself more plentifully than the roast. And of course it was a great-grandmother of a stove, thoroughly rusty, which fussed and drooled before it would cook at all. My only success was 'Welsh rarebit' which, when I could disentangle myself from it, tasted excellent.

One week we had a cook, and she actually *liked* cooking. None of our friends would believe in such a miracle, so we had a party. It was full of good-looking Generals and a particularly lovely blonde—I think she was a film star—who entertained them without difficulty. Prince Bernhard, always an asset because he can make everyone feel assured, successful, and interesting, helped distribute the mixed grill. It was very mixed, but sausage at heart. Stella Carcano, incomparable in the dead black which Argentina wears so well, and her Ambassador husband, looked elegantly not-at-war. Brenda de Chimay, with her husband already in North Africa, was equally exquisite, straight from scrubbing canteen crockery. The Generals enjoyed themselves. The American Naval Attaché played marvellous swing. The Duty Officer at the Admiralty, appealed to by telephone, lent his wireless. An Admiral in person fetched it. Plugged in, it promptly extinguished every light. The party went on. It grew bigger and better. My immensely tall friend Keith Miller-Jones, cautious as a lawyer, reckless as a musician, played us all into silence and content. The Generals, more and more of them, went on enjoying themselves, as they tried to talk Polish, Dutch, Norwegian or the blonde's emphatic Anglo-Saxon. So did the hired waitress. Sentimentally, she beamed upon us. "It's just like before the war," she murmured. "I do feel at home—such a lot of the gentry, and I recognize them all."

It was odd how war limited the possibilities of friendship. One saw so few people one knew. They were scattered out of reach—in hospitals and factories. Years were cut clean out of everybody's social life. For there was, literally, no way of getting about. Petrol for private purposes did not exist. The battle to get into a train—except on a job—was too much for the average body. The country-houses, where we used to stay, had been taken over for the war. My brother's place in Lincolnshire was an Air Force barracks, the park cemented for hutments, the pine and oak woods hewn for timber. Lord Monsell's Gloucestershire house, where gay Whitsuntide parties used to gather, housed first B.B.C. staff and then Land Girls. Aline Wigan's lovely 'Danbury Park', once a Bishop's Palace, had become a maternity home. I forget how many hundreds of babies were born in the ballroom where we used to dance. In Scotland, the Lauderdales' immense castle harboured a girls' school, and Blair Drummond, where Nadejda Muir entertained all Europe to Scotch grouse, was a hospital. I don't know what happened to the Carlisles' border castle, Naworth, dramatic setting for its châtelaine's excelling shape, but George was back in the Navy and Biddy more

elegant than ever in A.I. uniform. So, by 1943, one saw only the handful of friends working in London. Brenda de Chumay was always a delight. I remember one absurd evening when she and Evan Tiedegar dined in our exiguous flat. As a change—being considerably bored with this world—we decided to make contact with another. I don't know which of us had sufficient energy to let it loose in the production of "psychic" phenomena. But in a chill, dull, adequately lit room, with my husband and Evan in uniform, Brenda in the tenuous neat black, short of skirt, but otherwise providing the maximum of warmth and covering, which was London's night uniform, we raised an extraordinary amount of sound. The walls bustled. Cracks and knocks suggested masons refreshed by beer. But ours was the corner flat. There was nothing beyond it—except the black-out.

At Christabel Amphill's, another night, we went on with the sport. Dinner had been sumptuous, I cannot remember why. Perhaps somebody had contributed rabbits. There was an Air Marshal, a sailor, a wholesale furrier, now in the R.A.F., and a Guardsman. Our hostess, who has the loveliest bones in London and had just finished a summer of night shifts in an aeroplane factory, was looking indescribably beautiful because she was so tired. She lay back in a big chair and relaxed. The rest of us, firelit, sat round a stubborn table and with intensity of thought, urged it into movement. I do not think we pushed. But the table, heavy as it was, caught the spirit of the Air Marshal who is credited with saying—upon a historic and unusually dangerous occasion—"The possible will be done at once. The impossible may take a little longer." That night the impossible did not keep us waiting. The table pranced. It positively rocketed. Leaping out of Lord Middleton's hold it flung itself into the fireplace. A very pretty lady giggled. Her enormous sapphire blue eyes grew larger. "Hush!" we murmured. "You *must* be serious." The table was nor. It blundered out of the fender and threw itself inclegantly upon its side. With irritated suspicion we looked at each other. But—still—I do not think anyone pushed!

Such evenings were the toys with which we played to make believe we were happy. They were fun, but they were not happiness.

CHAPTER XLII

1943

Not a Single Ugly Thing. American Atlantic Lights in New York

Long ago, in Rome, I remember John de Salis, whose father was then British Minister to the Vatican, saying, "I never understood the mean-

ing of eternity until I called upon a Cardinal without an appointment." Those were the days which asked no questions except concerning the latest witticism of the incorrigible Paola de Medici, *whom* Princess Vigiano had omitted to ask to her famous ball, or *with whom* the fabulous Vittoria Colonna married to the Gaetani had lunched abroad. Then we none of us thought much about eternity. I considered little else—in the meaning of John de Salis—all through that last year of England's queues. Eternity dripped through our fingers, minute by minute, as we stood or shuffled, waiting for the—generally—unobtainable. But it came to an abrupt end for me. I got measles. That does not sound very final, but in middle-aged, civilian London in 1943, it was so. Worried doctors were saying, "We can't get our patients out of bed. Once down, they stay flat. They can't make another effort." Why should one, I thought. It was heavenly comfortable. I did not have to look at myself. In fact I could not see. So there was nothing to worry me—in the top-floor flat. Raids could only be regarded as a possible solution. I said so to my nurse, who was young and pretty. She rebuked me and proffered a peculiarly unpleasant "shape". It was supposed to be jelly.

Being ill in 1943—if you were not in hospital—was something of a game. A charming doctor came and wrote the loveliest list of things you should eat and medicines you must take. The serious young nurse, prettier than ever with determination in her tilted smile, set forth to forage. *Hours* later, she returned with more slabs of "shape". It might be a different colour. The taste was the same, definitely reminiscent of soap. Surprised, she would relate the chemist's "We haven't any of that drug at the moment. We might have some next week." Indignant, she would retail the comments of hard-hearted shopkeepers with regard to calves' foot jelly, eggs, or fruit. "Who do you think we are—St. Peter or Maskelyne and Devant?" Certainly neither apostles nor magicians could conjure invalid 'loaves and fishes' or 'rabbits out of a hat' in London that summer. Decidedly hollow, I got up. And as they could not give me food, 'they'—the mysterious 'they' invisible as the Income Tax or the 'Face of God'—gave me a holiday. Still blurred—in eyesight—and shaky, I went to stay with Jim and Daisy Wigan at Bradstone Brook. So the miracle happened, and instead of letting life run through my fingers, thankful as each day came to an end, I began hoarding the hours. For they were irreplaceable treasures. Bradstone is a red brick William and Mary house, not too large for intimacy. There is not a single ugly thing in it. Daisy is utterly charming and she has, above all women I know, except perhaps Princess Marthe Bibesco and Violet Trefusis, the art of conversation. It is with her the most delicious game, and so excellently does she play it that her partners invariably consider themselves responsible for her triumphs. Hospitality can go no further. Anyone who stays at Bradstone is surprised to find how clever he or she is and how much liked.

The combination of the house and the woman is irresistible. So is the garden. Jimmy, very pleasant to look at, enigmatic as a companion and therefore decidedly intriguing, used to expostulate—at the drought which was most un-English, at the phenomenal growth of grass which should have been shorn, at the rambling ways of roses, the obstinacy of heavy-headed peonies delighted to be unstaked. But in spite of dearth of gardeners, of no petrol for the mowing-machines, of rabbits fattening unaesthetically upon the lawns, the garden was lovely. One month there were floods of narcissi. Azalcas burned by the brook. A huge magnolia flaunted ivory and amethyst cups. Later the lupins were as a coral forest under lilac shadowed seas. Then delphiniums turned the whole world blue. And we talked of flowers in the long, quiet evenings when I had finished writing and the Wigans were back from work. Daisy was no arithmetician. Of that I remain convinced. For she insisted she was well over sixty. Impossible! Immaculate each morning—no wear and tear apparent even in her expression—she caught an early train to London. All day she sewed or folded bandages or shaped splints or shook and sorted moss in a hospital supply dépôt supervised by my much loved sister-in-law Joy McGrath. In the evening, still deliciously unruffled, she returned to keep us laughing or excited with what we thought was our own genius in speech till the double-summer-time faded at last into bedtime. I was happy that summer at Bradstone. For so long life had been ugly—useful, I hope, interesting at times, but definitely hideous. That summer, writing most of this book with my eyes half shut because they hurt so much, I had beauty all round me and I worshipped it. So easily I can do without comfort. But hibiscus or delphiniums—wanton splendour or ordered elegance—a Cézanne or a Renoir portrait, Chippendale and Sheraton, the eagle supporting—in a moment of stillness—a marble console in the Bradstone dining-room give me physical delight. I am not whole without beauty. It does not matter the kind. Maple woods and birches flaming in the American autumn and the austerity of enormous beeches bared by winter at The Hague—they are equally satisfying. I do not know whether I prefer colour or shape. Both can have the quality of a crucifixion. Sound for me is definitely sensuous. I enjoy it, but it does not inspire me.

At Bradstone, there was a mellow ease of living, comparable only to the flawless lustre of the old mahogany and walnut. Much of this was due to Harriet. She is a very great woman. She is also an admirable housemaid. I never saw her out of temper, even when—arranging panoplies of unexpected flowers—I spilled leaves all over her carpets. Of course they were *her* carpets. Everything at Bradstone was 'hers', including the guests. So she represents a way of living and of feeling—ample in quality, valuable in expression—much misunderstood in newer and more experimental communities. Harriet made one personal concession to frailty. She possessed a guinea-pig, enormously fat, pre-

posterously spoiled. On it, she lavished all the affection she could spare from the house. To it, everything—even its shape—was allowed. I had a rabbit called 'Joe'. He was comparatively tame, and he adored eating the most expensive roses. I thought him enchanting. Everyone else detested him.

All day long, above the peace and beauty of Bradstone, flew our fighting planes. We were a signpost on the way to the Channel. At night we heard the bomber formations go over hour after hour. At times we could hear the Channel guns. At intervals there were bombs—not too distant. So, as a background to the garden and the old house, its dreams reflected in storied glass and wood, there was the undimensional tapestry of war. In midsummer, on a Saturday afternoon, the townsfolk at neighbouring East Grinstead gathered in their big, new cinema. A solitary German plane came down almost to roof level, circled once, then dropped its stick of bombs straight on to the roof. I do not remember the exact number of killed. It seemed to us, it was 'everybody'. The town, our town, was emptied of familiar faces.

Convalescence came to an end. I went back to my lecturing. In the basement of a Lancashire Town Hall, with the Mayor and Mayoress and the civic caretaker, I listened to Italy's capitulation. We had supped on fish and chips—delectable! We had hurried our speeches for the sake of the nine o'clock news. We sat, drinking the caretaker's hoarded bottle of sherry, a few coals recklessly burning, plush and varnish homely around us, while—over the radio—came news which we then thought might be the first letters of Omega . . . the End.

We were wrong, how wrong! But that did not make the moment less exciting.

Most other moments I remember that winter were in some way connected with Russia. England is always over-diffident in war, as over-confident in peace—so far as her own merits are concerned. So in the industrial boroughs, where I was speaking on "The Making of To-day"—a twenty years' review of Europe—enthusiastic workers were apt to attribute all success, and all kinds of success, to Russia. There were many interesting discussions. Invariably somebody said, "The Soviet system is justified by the way Russians are fighting. If the people didn't think it pretty wonderful, they wouldn't make such sacrifices for it." Generally somebody else pointed out, "But the Germans are fighting equally hard. Would you say Nazism was 'pretty wonderful'?" That year saw the height of Russia worship. With 1944 came the full flavour of Americanism. For England, having saved the world after Dunkirk, and having even read in plain print in American papers, if no others, that she had so saved it, was still diffident. Her sons had died so persistently and so far afield—on land whose diverse names she did not even know, in the stratosphere, on world seas and under them—that she took the war as a habit. She would not measure her own achievements. If it was not Russia, it was America she praised. Con-

scious of the flaws in her peace-time system, England was groping for a new one—should it be red, or starred and striped?—without realizing how she had earned the future with the present. It was something that she looked ahead. Not a Mayor or Councillor on a Town Hall platform but spoke of peace as “a harder job than war”, and the work of a generation no longer mine. So, at last, after years steeped in the present—and the war—I also began to think about the future. I wondered, not only what it would hold for all of us, but what I myself could put into it. Not much, I thought. For war is as the distance between planets. With insuperable space it divides the generations preceding and following. What we did and what we failed to do between 1918 and 1939 will be food for historians, but not for the peace-makers of the next decade. I am glad I am still young enough to be interested in their work. From Eleuthera, in the sun, beside the sea—I shall watch the ‘gypsies’ of another period, enthusiastic, compassionate, spiritually militant as I was, successful I hope as I have never been. I shall listen to the politicians manipulating other appointments with destiny. I shall remember—beside the striped silken seas I love—how much I saw of beauty and of fear all over the world, how much I learned and how little I achieved. For with all my experience of people and nations, with the opportunity to write and speak, surely I should have been able to contribute a mite—not to the *making* but to the *preventing* of ‘to-day’. That is my only regret. I would have liked—so much—to have been more useful.

In no other way can I be concerned with credit and debit in my own personal ledger. For how can any individual matter in the cosmic struggle my generation is privileged to watch? Not long ago I talked with a girl in uniform about her sister's marriage. “I hope she is happy,” I remarked with casual amiability. There was a pause. “Does it matter?” said the girl surprisingly. Without thinking, I retorted, “What do you mean? Of course it matters. In sum, it is what we are fighting for, surely—freedom, which is, in exact terms, the prosperity and the happiness of the individual.”

The girl in uniform had just come off night duty with an anti-aircraft battery. Her eyes still held a strained expectancy. With gravity, placing her words slowly as if they were bricks in a wall, she said, “Perhaps—but that is in the future. To-day the happiness of one person or another cannot possibly matter. Think of Greece and Poland.” There was another pause. “I cannot pretend that any people now, even my own people, are important.”

That particular morning I breakfasted in a canteen. It was quick, efficient and noisy. Amidst the general clatter, I imagined myself alone. Appointment with destiny had been fulfilled. I had found my island in the sun—and my unicorn. But—with these waiting for me, beautiful and strange beyond belief, there was only one thing which mattered. It is a tremendous thing—like truth, “far too big for one

man's pocket". For it is, in effect, the value of the war and what our victory will mean to the world which has struggled and suffered, dreamed, feared and hoped, despaired and grown bitter, hoped again and prayed. All ordinary people, enemy as well as allied, have done just these same things. What will their agonies and their sacrifices, their appeals to justice and their courage—their different faiths in diverse gods—what will these avail? Is the task of peace too big for human brains? What will be imposed upon the world in place of the political creeds and social experiments by which, for the last twenty years, most countries have made special, and I believe very often mistaken, progress towards their own solutions?

At the end of '43, I crossed the Atlantic again with my husband. This time it was on the largest liner afloat. She had become a troopship. There were even more guns than, in days of peace, there had been entertainments. Guns, familiar or nightmarish, were as the leaves of trees. I think there were only half a dozen passengers not in uniform. Before we left harbour, the C.O. personnel summoned officers and civilians to the still splendid music-room and made us a speech. It was a good one. He said, "As soon as we leave port we go straight into the first line of battle. Make no mistake. Each time this ship crosses the Atlantic, it is a major operation of war."

After this we were prepared for anything, but all that happened was a peaceful week during which, in late November, the weather got hotter and hotter. We thought the Captain must have confused the Americas and expected any moment to be talking Portuguese in Rio! We drank a great deal of excellent Bovril with Percy Lawson Johnson upon the boat-deck. We shared ideas rather than opinions with numbers of airmen and sailors, all of whom seemed to have spent any leisure left by battle in thinking. I have never known Englishmen think so much. There was still a Russian flavour to their speech. The President of the American Chamber of Commerce had not yet made that able address at an official party somewhere in Siberia saying, in effect, that he fully understood and appreciated the Soviet Union's belief in their own way of living, but that the Americans were even more set on theirs. The fearless Mr. Dewey had not yet expressed the uneasiness of many fellow-countrymen concerning the fate of small countries promised free choice of their future by the Atlantic Charter. Finland had not yet been deprived of Petsamo ore which, to a great extent, means her bread and butter—consequently her prosperity, health and power of being a good neighbour. General Bor's heroic patriots of Warsaw—referred to in epic measure by American politicians—had not yet been sacrificed to political expediency. Yet, while men in uniform—at sea on a strange, great ship and therefore a little freer than usual of conventional opinion—expressed immeasurable appreciation of Russia's fighting, there were some who wondered if and how, in victory, she would feel it necessary to secure the safety of her own 180 millions by

limiting the freedom with the frontiers of her small, defenceless neighbours. Never, in all history, we decided, has a great nation had a chance to play so great a part. All that England did—and it was much—in the golden (or gilded) age of Victoria, Russia could do in at most two years. For good or ill, the future for which half Europe, from Finland to Yugoslavia, sought so desperately between two world wars, will be in the hands of Moscow. Security is not enough to give after so much suffering. The Nazi dictatorship could and would have provided security cut to its own pattern. No nation willingly accepted it. Even the people of Italy hoped for more elasticity in their ordered—and militant—prosperity. There can be no security without content. Will the great Marshal Stalin, incomparable statesman and strategist so far as his own country is concerned, be able to rid himself of fears inherited from Czarist persecution and fears induced by power politics mislabelled "Capitalist", in order to be generous? Much will be asked of Britain and America, at the peace table and long after it has been forgotten. One thing only—generosity—will be asked of Russia, in Helsinki and Budapest, in Warsaw deeply honoured, in peasant Sofia, and in sophisticated, somewhat synthetic Bucharest. The war she has fought crowns Russia with laurels, but it is by the peace she makes that—while the world lives and men have power to think—she will inevitably be judged.

I remember all this being said in a corner of the vast music saloon, afloat. It was not said by one man, but by many. Britain and America were already successful throughout North Africa. Sicily had been taken and Southern Italy freed. One or two grey-haired officers, with many ribbons on their tunics, must have known—like my husband straight from G.H.Q.—the date, the place and the shape of Normandy invasion. So they could look ahead, beyond victory, to peace which might be more painful than war, if the lights lit by the Atlantic Charter were one by one extinguished.

On board the mighty liner the beds were superb; the food, I thought too good to be credible. The white bread I wanted to caress before eating it! All over the war-stripped, war-painted decks lads bound for training camps or their first ships of war, sat hunched against lifeboats or bulkheads and wrote long letters to their people. Sometimes they consulted about their spelling. When I walked vigorously in my rough coral tweed—couponless, made from a railway rug—becomingly muffled in fur, they stopped sucking or stubbing their pencils and whistled. I was greatly flattered. But what I remember most was the conversation at many different times, with different men in uniform—but, oddly, it was always the same conversation. We were bound for the new world—for the greatest power on earth. By this destination we must have been influenced. So in our minds, appointment with destiny took shape—not ours alone, but that of a world still fighting.

Late at night we docked in New York. Most of us had not seen a

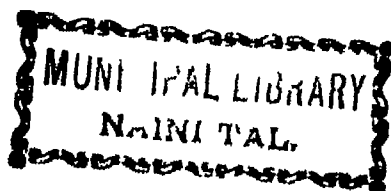
city lighted for several years. In spite of the cold, we waited on the highest deck in silence. It was as if something of youth and assurance were given back to us. The loveliest skyline in the world soared like the gladness of Christmas bells. An invisible carillon rang. It was in our hearts. I could not believe the lights were due to human efficiency. They seemed to me a promise. Convictions, not opinions, were expressed in the endless towers, rising higher and higher 'like a cloud of fire in the blue empyrean'. Shelley should have written his 'Skylark' for our feelings as we stood on deck, shivering, and imagined every light—relit—was a letter of the Atlantic Charter.

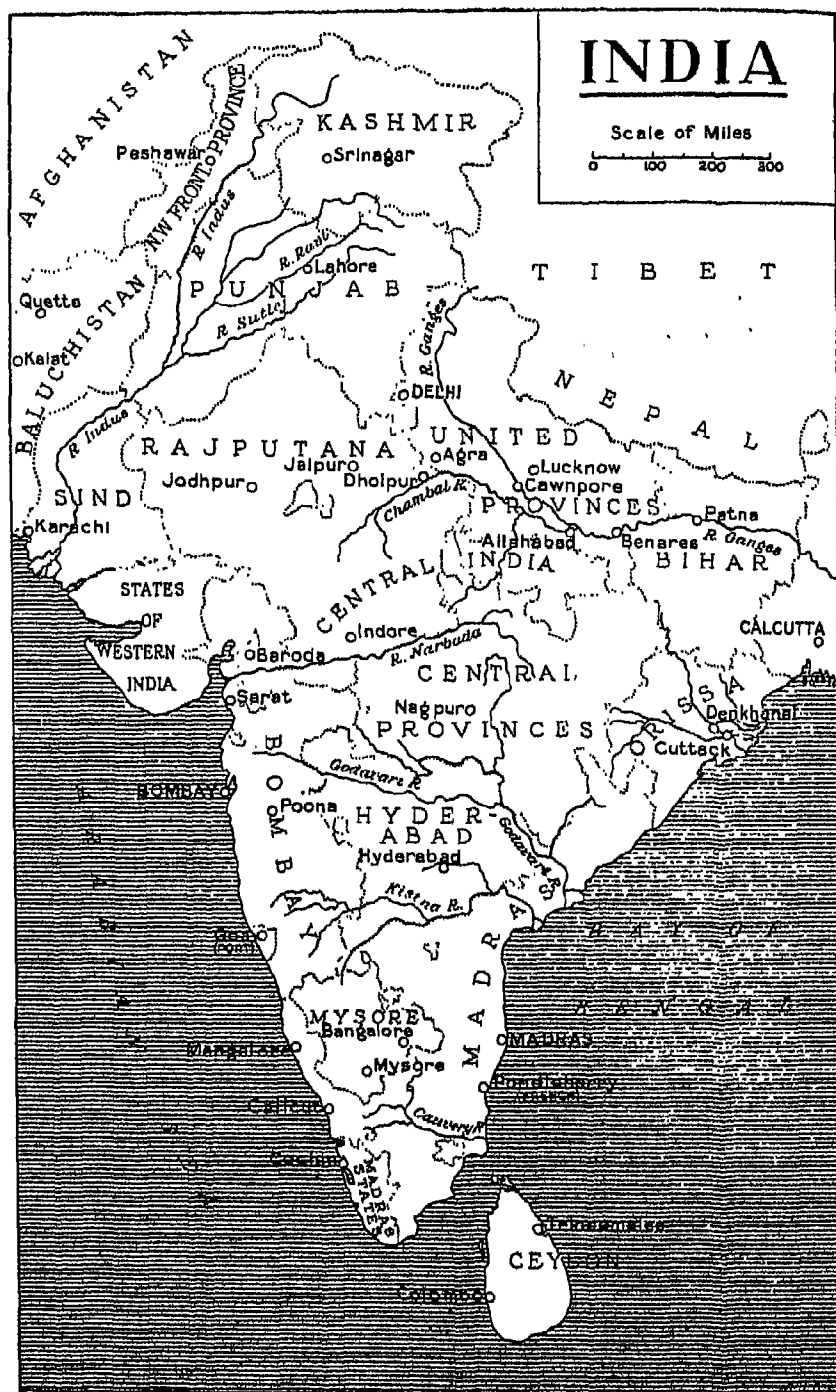
On the dock, it was colder still. Arthur, enormous in his bulky 'British warm', was surrounded by slender figures in the most becoming grey. They seemed to me too attractive to be real. The designer of America's Red Cross uniform did one of the most satisfactory war jobs. Nothing could have been more pleasing, in the middle of the night, hungry and chill, than the sight of so many pretty women—with undarned stockings—in exactly the right combination of crimson and blue-grey. The doughnuts they proffered were almost equally comforting, and the coffee, as always in America, was *HOT*. How I enjoyed myself! A delicious grey-haired woman with ankles slender as the best-bred unicorns in the most fabulous tapestry, stopped saying, "Couldn't you eat one more—they're so light", and "There's *plenty of coffee*"—because somehow an English aerodrome had come into our conversation. There American engineers had fed me on doughnuts. I must have said so—undoubtedly with pleasure.

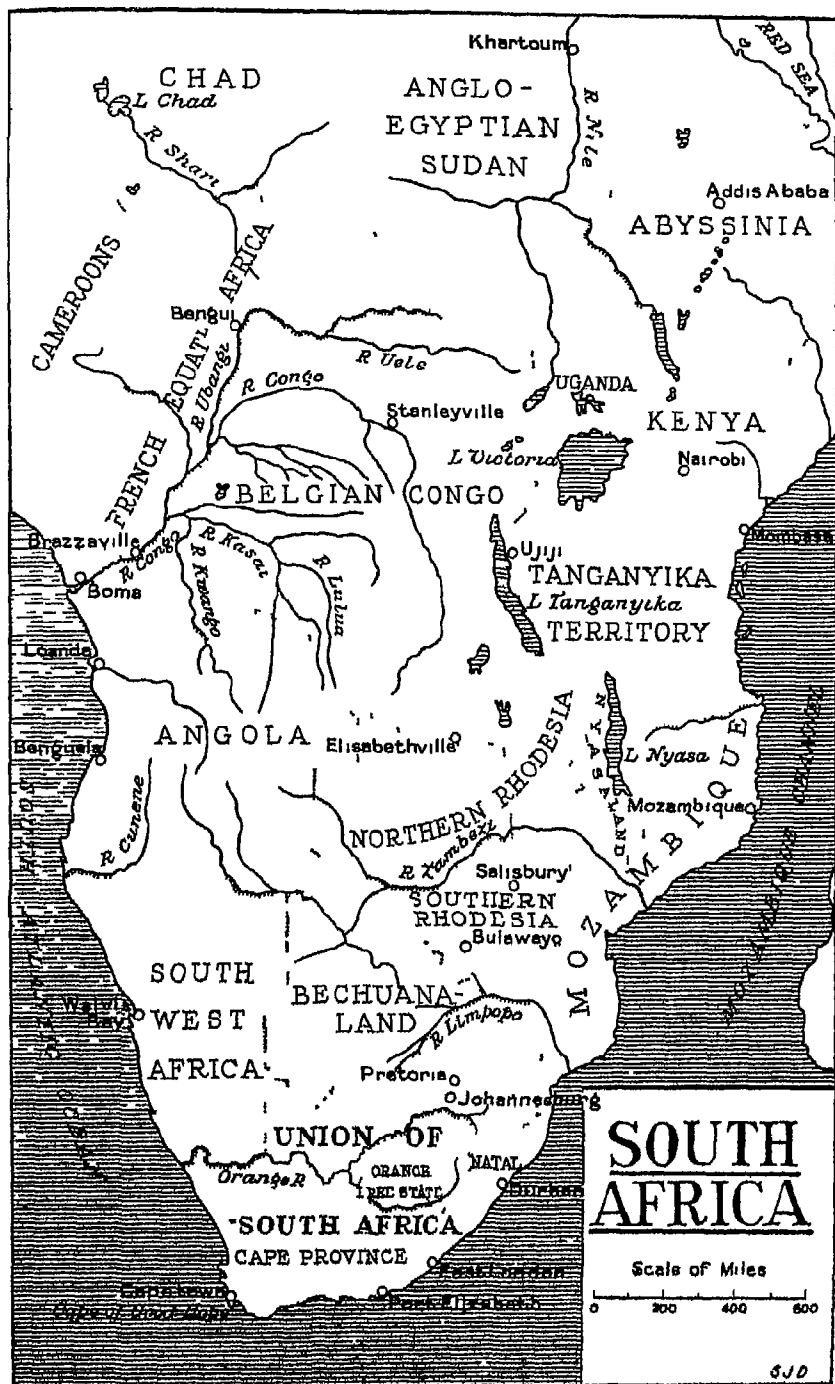
"My son is there," said the cool, grey lady in grey uniform. Her voice had changed. It was no longer American. It belonged to no one country—but to all of us, at war. "At least, he *was* there, training. He is at the front now." We looked at each other—without further speech. No more needed to be said. I ceased being sad—terribly sad—to leave England. Instead, I was glad, wholly glad, to be in America. The Atlantic was bridged. By whatever word we call it, in whatever accent we speak it, the meaning of the future and its purpose seemed to me clear. Between them in the Atlantic Charter, two great peoples had written in the name of the free world, our appointment with Destiny.

BRADSTONE BROOK, SURREY
ENGLAND, July, 1943

CARAMOOR, WESTCHESTER
U.S.A., October, 1944







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